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NAVIGATING MIXED MESSAGES ABOUT GENDER: MEN AND WOMEN IN THE NORTHERN PLAINS IN THE 1950S

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the History Department

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Kearney

By

Sarah Zacher

May 2021

THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in History, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

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ABSTRACT

The 1950s stand out as a decade of traditional gender roles with mass media and popular culture continuously reinforcing messages about patriarchy, consumer culture, and the ideal of domesticity. Advertisements, magazines, and newspapers painted pictures of happy, white middle-class women utilizing the latest advancements in food and homemaking as they happily doted over their children. Likewise, men were shown pulling up to their suburban home from a hard day's work, happy to have a meal prepared for them by their wives. Meanwhile, due to consolidation of family farms, white men and women in the Northern Great Plains states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska searched for alternative ways to stay afloat and navigated away from the traditional ideals being portrayed to the public in the 1950s. Many women in these states found their suitable roles working outside of the home to support their families and contribute to their communities. Other chose to remain single, further contradicting gender role expectations. Men would likewise challenge the national image of masculinity as they increasingly engaged in domestic roles at home.

The reality of life in the Great Plains contradicted the image of traditional gender roles popularized in national media. On the local level, advertising and newspaper columns in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska responded to these changing gender roles. Drawing on primary sources such as advertisements and reports in local newspapers, this thesis argues that Great Plains media shaped expectations for traditional gender roles on the one hand while reflecting the reality of economic and social change

on the other. In navigating traditional perceptions of gender in the 1950s, local media for men and women in the Great Plains sent mixed messages about gender roles, laying the foundation for considerable changes in the 1960s and beyond.

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INTRODUCTION/HISTORIOGRAPHY

> "*The reason we have such a high standard of living is because advertising has created an American frame of mind that makes people want more things, better things, and newer things."*[1]

The 1950s stand as one of the most dynamic decades in the history of the United States. The country marched out of World War II as the world's strongest military power, the economy boomed, a remarkable number of babies were born, and consumer goods became available to the masses like never before. At the same time, another conflict loomed in the shadows. While Americans rushed to buy the newest vehicles and settled in their suburban homes, the threat of communism captivated and scared the nation. Central to both the booming era of the 1950s and the so-called "Red Scare" were carefully cultivated advertising campaigns. Mass media and popular culture continuously reinforced messages about consumer culture, traditional gender roles, and the ideal of domesticity.

Advertisements, magazines, and newspapers painted pictures of happy, white middle class women utilizing the latest advancements in food and homemaking as they doted over their children with perfectly done hair and a smile plastered on their face. Likewise, men were shown coming home from a hard day's work, happy to have a meal prepared for them by their lovely wives. They lived in a suburban home, with a well-

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[1] Robert Sarnoff, president of the National Broadcasting Company, 1956 quoted in Douglas T. Miller, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 117.

manicured yard, a white picket fence, and a sparkling Ford in front of the carport. This was the portrait Americans saw throughout everyday reads and television screens. This was the American Dream.

Meanwhile, in the more rural areas of the U.S., family farms faced steep decline through consolidation, leaving many to steer away from the traditional ideals being portrayed to the public in the 1950s. Specifically, white men and women in the Great Plains states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska searched for alternative ways to stay afloat. While attempting to do so, they found themselves juxtaposed between survival and a need to conform to the emerging post-war identity. Although mass media detailed that women's proper place was within the home, many women within these states found their suitable roles working outsides of the home to support their families and become active individuals in the local construction of cultural life and social activism. An increasing number of women within these Midwestern states, moreover, would choose to remain single, seeking both their independence and ways to keep up with the ideal womanly image portrayed within local and national advertisements and articles. The national image of men's roles would also challenge the national image of masculinity. With more women working outside of the home and relying on labor-saving tools for the farm, men increasingly engaged in domestic roles at home. This challenge to traditional gender roles, however, would be limited. While many men welcomed their wives' new roles, they also wished to keep a traditional patriarchal structure in their role as the head of the household.

This thesis explores the advertising and newspaper columns in the Great Plains states, and how they compare to the national messages of traditional gender roles. Rather than adhere to a strict ideal of masculinity and femininity, Great Plains media presented a mixed message of what men and women could do. The key to accentuating these mixed messages is through the analysis of primary advertisements and articles within local newspapers of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska as well as well-known national magazines during the 1950s. Secondary sources are equally important as scholars have produced numerous texts examining the role of advertising during the 1950s. Authors have highlighted how prolific local and national advertising was in promoting the womanly image and their role within the household, the importance of the patriarchal family as a unit, and the impact of consumerism. At the same time, historians have documented how advertisements created double meanings for men and women, further solidifying traditional gender norms while also showing how women in the 1950s contributed far more to society as active members outside of the home sphere. Studies of gender on the Plains, though less abundant, remain equally important as scholars seek to explain to what extent the distinctiveness of the Plains experience has altered gender identities in these areas.

Throughout the 1950s, traditional gender roles were largely promoted in three ways. First, the language of politics was gendered in a way that emphasized traditional roles, especially in terms of masculinity. The emphasis on traditional and masculine roles can be found within K.A. Courdileone's article, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety.'" Within his work, Courdileone explains that Cold War American politics reflected a

specific image that presented men as needing to maintain a specific toughness to combat any threat to national security.[2] Second, the U.S. government emphasized that maintaining traditional gender roles was imperative to national security. Specifically, Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* details family life and the importance of marriage, virtue, sex roles, consumerism, and suburbanism while extensively highlighting and linking ideas of foreign policy containment and national security with that of the containment of domestic values during the two decades. She explains why the return to domesticity after WWII occurred, concluding that the nuclear family served as a bulwark against the infiltration of communist ideals.[3] Further, mass media shaped a national image of the white American middle-class family with traditional gender roles. The emphasis on traditional gender roles in mass-media is especially evident when analyzing popular television programs and magazines of the 1950s.[4] While scholars are just beginning to focus on the impact of television shows on gender, they have been prolific in their focus on mass advertising in magazines.

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[2] K.A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (September 2000), 515-545.

[3] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

[4] For examples of the relationship between gender roles and mass-media during the 1950s see Brandy Haglin, "Chapter 1: "Lucy you've got some 'plaining to do!" in "From Laura Petrie to Wonder Woman: Analyzing the Feminist Movement Through 1960s and 1970s Prime Time Television," MA Thesis, University of Nebraska, Kearney, 2017, and Donald W. White, "The 'American Century' in World History," *Journal of World History* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 105-127.

Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was the first groundbreaking work to emphasize how advertising painted an ideal picture of the happy and domestic middle-class woman. Rather than feeling happy and fulfilled, however, Friedan found that the suburban women she interviewed felt frustration, depression, and even viewed themselves as failures when they could not achieve a real sense of accomplishment or happiness promoted by the advertisements. To combat these feelings, which she called the "feminine mystique," Friedan exposed the power of advertising in shaping gender roles and expectations. Rather than adhere to these norms, she suggested that women could have a family as well as a successful career. Erving Goffman's 1976 *Gender Advertisements* also examined the nuances and social undertones used by advertisers in their depictions of men and women. Goffman argues that advertisements showed a woman's role as being focused on cleaning within the kitchen, living room, and nursery. Likewise, Goffman found that in advertisements including both men and women, women were normally positioned physically below the man which implied subordination.[5]

Similarly, works in the 1970s evaluate the role that advertising had in swaying public opinion and creating a mass consumer culture. Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* documented that advertising exploited people's desires for material comfort while also creating feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, and insecurity.[6] Advertising

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[5] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 72; Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (Palgrave, 1976).

[6] Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

also capitalized on and promoted the deterioration of culture and influenced the political ideals of democracy, freedom, and gender equality. Victor Margolin's 1979 work, *The Promise and the Product*, also emphasizes how advertisers created ingenious ways to sell products and to sway principles and ideologies, positioning women and men in specific, and often traditional, gender roles.[7]

These ads promoting traditional gender roles could be found mainly in magazines throughout the first half of the 1900s. According to William Weilbacher in his 1979 book *Advertising*, since magazines were the most likely source kept in the home compared to newspapers, they stood as the primary vehicles used for advertising and this led not only to repeated reading, but repeated exposure to the material. Much of this repeated exposure aided in marketing new ideas in technology and new ways of homemaking.[8]

Many scholars have asserted that the rise in new technologically advanced products helped ease burdens while simultaneously adding additional types of housework for women and instructing them in their proper domestic roles. Prolific examples of this impact of technology on housework can be found within the 1980's works of Ruth Cowan and Glenna Matthews. Cowan's *More Work for Mother* highlights the uptick in time-consuming chores, asserting that the stove, though coined as labor-easing, increased the amount of time women spent in the kitchen and provided more complex cooking

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[7] Victor Margolin, Ira Brichta, and Vivian Brichta, *The Promise and the Product* (New York: Macmillan, 1979).

[8] William Weilbacher, *Advertising* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979).

chores. Following Cowan's claims, Matthews' *Just a Housewife* also notes the paradoxical impact of industrialization on household chores and how advertising emphasized brand-name buying, raising the pressure women felt to meet cultural expectations. Matthews' analysis stresses that the activity of housework was fundamental to constructing the home atmosphere. She documents the historical importance of women's domesticity and the home as a powerful social symbol connected to women's housework.[9]

More recently, Jessamyn Neuhaus examined cookbooks published in the 1950s and found these books, like technology, claimed to reduce the burden of housework for women while also expanding expectations of their work. New kitchen gadgets and processed food freed women from the kitchen, for example, and cookbooks offered simple and quick recipes, but they also urged women to be creative in their cooking, further tying them to the kitchen. Such works point to the contradictory messages women received about labor-saving devices. Rather than freeing up their time for other pursuits, they expanded and increased expectations about women's domesticity.[10]

While markets pushed out new products with great fervency during the first half of the 20th century, and advertisements aimed to solidify women's role in the home, changing ideals of feminine beauty also emerged, leading to mass-marketing of beauty

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[9] Ruth Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Glenna Matthews, *Just a Housewife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[10] Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 3 (1999) and *Housework and Housewives in American Advertising* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

products and regimens. Many scholars have noted the effect that ads had on creating a specific beauty image for women. Carol Hymowitz's *A History of Women in America* details how images in advertisements promoted a specific beauty look to be socially acceptable and attractive, and to solidify their roles as wives and mothers. According to Jackson Lears in his 1984 *The Culture of Consumption*, since women were considered the ones who managed purchasing for the household and were seen as vulnerable to emotional appeals, advertisements within media consistently targeted them. During the 1950s, ads focused more than ever on positioning women in the home and tying their self-worth and societal expectations to maintaining their beauty. These ads, featuring provocative design layouts, also showcased double meanings. According to Barbara Coleman, advertisements targeted at women evoked a sense of liberation while still tying women to their proper place in the home.[11]

Scholarship on the societal construction of gender roles during the 1950s have been especially impressive. Numerous historians have compiled defining themes and documents of the 1950s, detailing important insight into what life was like during this pivotal era and offering a snapshot into social classes and profiles of work, home, and community life of American families. For example, William Chafe argued that WWII

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[11] Carol Hymowitz and Michael Weissman, *A History of Women in America* (New York: Bantam, 1978); Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Barbara J. Coleman, "Maidenform(ed): Images of American Women in the 1950s," in *Forming and Reforming Identity*, ed. Carol Siegal and Ann Kibbey (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

had a significant impact on women's place in society, bringing changes that went mostly uncontested because they did not bring significant shifts to traditional gender roles.[12]

Joanne Meyerowitz's 1993 article, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," challenges this scholarship of a singular view of women as domestic. She especially challenges Betty Friedan's exclusive focus on ads about women as housewives by showcasing the competing images of women in the mass media of the 1950s. Investigating nearly 500 articles in magazines throughout the late 1940s to the late 1950s, Meyerowitz reexamined the popular discourse of domesticity in white middle-class America. Offering a new analysis of what had been the widely accepted conclusion that women in the postwar years only faced a constant onslaught of subordinate domesticity throughout public and popular culture, Meyerowitz found that mass-circulated magazine articles advocated both nondomestic and domestic roles for women. Further, these contrasting images were often found within the same magazines and sometimes even within the same articles. Meyerowitz's work offers a powerful, and important, revision to the historical narrative

[12] William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Donald M. Scott and Bernard Wishy, *America's Families: A Documentary History* (Harper Collins, 1987); Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (Lincoln, NE: ASIA Press, 2002); Rusty Monhollon, *Baby Boom: People and Perspectives* (ABC-CLIO, 2010); Scott Derks and Laura Mars, *This is Who We Were: In the 1950s* (Grey House Publishing, 2013); Michael Shally-Jensen, *Defining Documents in American History: The 1950s* (Salem Press, 2016); James S. Olson, *The 1950s: Key Themes and Documents* (ABC-CLIO, 2018).

that showcases the many mixed messages that were presented to women in the 1950s. This thesis builds upon her argument.[13]

Much has been written about men in the 1950s. However, while studies of masculinity have risen only in the past few years, few encompass the areas of the Great Plains. Steve Gelber's 1997 article entitled "Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity," highlights a significant shift from women primarily maintaining the home in the late-1800s to men taking on this responsibility, becoming increasingly active in repair and "do-it-yourself" housework. According to Gelber, during the early-to-mid 1900s, men took over chores that were previously handled by hired professionals and created a new, distinct place for themselves inside of the household. This do-it-yourself mentality created a reassertion of traditional male control of the environment, as working with tools and fixing things themselves allowed men to recapture pride in a heavily industrialized society. By the 1950s, the ability for men to be handy and "do-it-yourselfers" was an expected quality in a good husband and aided in defining ideas of masculinity.[14]

With numerous social critics believing the new white-collar worker lacked character and had no meaningful work to head off to, many during the 1950s concluded

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[13] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993).

[14] Steven Gelber, "Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity," *American Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1997): 66-112.

there was a masculinity crisis.[15] James Gilbert's 2005 study, *Men in the Middle*, is especially influential in showcasing alternative views of masculinity during the 1950s. By analyzing the famed 1950 work, *The Lonely Crowd*, that insisted that men were in a masculinity crisis, Gilbert explained that men found numerous ways to challenge normative definitions of masculinity and navigate social transformations of the postwar era. For example, he shows how highly publicized men, like "Ozzie" in the *Ozzie and Harriet Show*, mocked traditional patriarchal ideas and instead showed families how to be flexible in their roles without undermining men's status. This idea of adaptable masculinity is also highlighted in Thomas Andrew Joyce's 2011 article, "A Nation of Employees." According to Joyce, during the 1950s, middle-class white males found themselves in a time of considerable social upheaval where men needed to change their ideas of masculinity to fit into a consumer and corporate nation. While Joyce adopts the concept of multiple masculinities that Gilbert put forth, he supports the argument that there was a regeneration of the "self-made" man image which became the dominant hegemonic male during the 1950s. Rather than a crisis, ideas of masculinity changed because men adapted to changes in the workplace and at home.[16]

Brian Baker's *Masculinity in Fiction and Film*, published in 2008, also tackles the ideas and perceptions of masculinity before and after World War II. Through analyses of

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[15] David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* speaks specifically of the masculinity crisis and offered an analysis of the changing social character in America.

[16] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); Thomas Andrew Joyce, "A Nation of Employees: The Rise of Corporations and the Perceived Crisis of Masculinity in the 1950s," *The Graduate History Review* 3, no. 1 (2011).

films such as westerns, science-fiction, detective narratives, and espionage movies, Baker asserts that the traditional warrior/hero definition of masculinity that remained strong during the war years was quickly dismissed in the postwar years as America dealt with the Cold War, new ideologies of consumerism and domesticity, and increasing mass media. This switch, Baker explains, comes from the notion that a nation generates a fictionalized masculine role model in films, literature, and advertisements to aid in producing men who can fill certain roles by emulating these role models. Baker's position highlights that life emulates art. Likewise, Evan Sidebottom's 2016 master's thesis, "The Man Who Could Go Either Way: The Many Faces of Cowboy Masculinity in 1950s American Film and Advertising," provides insight into the impact that film and advertising in the 1950s had on shaping multiple projections of masculinity. According to Sidebottom, the iconic figure of the cowboy as the mascot for white masculinity during the 1950s presented many contradictory images that allowed diverse masculinities to develop. Building on Gilbert's refutation of a crisis of masculinity, Sidebottom highlighted the array of diverse masculinities and the constant shifting of existing ideals of gender. In this view, images of the cowboy in advertising and film reinforced the shifting social ideals of American men in the 1950s. With a significant lack of scholarship on masculinity in the midwestern states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska during the 1950s, Sidebottom's use and analysis of the cowboy, a symbol that

was integral to the midwestern areas, can contribute to a regional analysis of masculinity.[17]

While scholarship on the effect of advertisements on gender roles in the Great Plains areas of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska are less abundant than those focused on the national perspective, many works provide significant insight into the shaping of attitudes, gender expectations, gender and societal struggles, and consumerism in these areas during the 1950s and beyond. Joan Jensen's 1981 work, *With These Hands*, provides a revealing account of numerous farm women on the Plains, ranging across all classes, races, and ethnicities from the mid-1800s to the 1950s. Throughout her work, Jensen included first-hand accounts of farm women and their relationship with the land, their thoughts and feelings toward their position as well as a highlighted attention toward women who had previously been devalued by historians, such as women of color. Likewise, Rachel Rosenfeld's 1985 work, *Farm Women*, based on the first national survey of farm women in 1980, provides a major contribution to literature on rural working women including women working in agricultural fields. Of the 2,509 women farmers and 569 male farmers sampled in the survey, Rosenfeld concluded that the majority of farm women were mostly engaged in traditional women's roles and work. This work, however, added value to the household economy. Moreover, over half of the women recognized themselves as principal farm operators. Overall, Rosenfeld's work

[17] Brian Baker, *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000* (A&C Black, 2008); Evan Sidebottom, "The Man Who Could Go Either Way: The Many Faces of Cowboy Masculinity in 1950s American Film and Advertising," (Master's thesis. Carleton University, 2016).

emphasized that gender-role stereotypes were inadequate in understanding the characteristics of women's work in farm areas because of the value of women's labor in the agriculture economy.[18]

In the 1990s, scholarship on farm women on the Plains continued to be particularly illuminating regarding women's experiences. In *Entitled to Power*, Katherine Jellison examines the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of technology on farm families, and the impact of advertising on men and women. Throughout her study, Jellison argues that during the 1950s, farm women did not embrace the limits of domestic ideology. Instead, many utilized new technology to replace hired workers and continued their roles as women in farm production. Further, many women got jobs off the farm to help out, often sustaining the family through shortages and hard times. This lack of conformity to domestic ideology creates a foundation for the idea of the distinctiveness of the Midwestern states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. This idea is further argued within Lucy Murphy and Wendy Venet's *Midwestern Woman*. In their pivotal 1997 work, Murphy and Venet argue that women of the Midwest from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century were distinct in their experiences due to kinship networks that they created; the crossroads of trade contributing to a mixture of East and West characteristics; their role as givers and recipients of cultural assimilation and accommodation; and because of their struggles with societal acceptance. In this account, Midwestern women were not simply

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[18] Joan M. Jensen, *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (Feminist Press, 1981); Rachel A. Rosenfeld, *Farm Women: Work, Farm, and Family in the United States* (University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

reflections of women from the East, West, or South, rather, they created their own distinguishable and distinctive characteristics.[19]

With the consolidation of family farms throughout the first half of the 1900s, farms in the Midwest often turned to family labor to ensure their survival. Mary Neth's *Preserving the Family Farm* highlights this strategy and provides a gendered analysis of the impact of agribusiness on farming families. According to Neth, the ability of farm women to socialize with other women, the exchange of gifts and food, as well as the work of men helping other men around the area, allowed rural neighborhoods and family farms to resist industrial agriculture. In doing so, farms that fell on hard times were more likely to be aided by other families. Likewise, this social connection also expanded women's economic roles, blurring a gendered distinction between male and female work and allowing for a shared sphere. Neth's study again highlighted a distinctiveness in the Midwest as men and women had to work together to survive as family farmers.[20]

This thesis outlines the myriad of ways that men and women in Nebraska and the Dakotas were able to navigate the mixed messages of national and local mass media. First, chapter one addresses the many ways that articles and popular media pushed women into marriage and domestic duties. It also showcases that many women within the Midwest area, aided by a significant decline in family farms, were not simply content

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[19] Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet, *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads* (Indiana University Press, 1997).

[20] Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest 1900-1940* (John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

with staying within the home as they moved to the workplace in increasing numbers. These married working women often faced conflicting messages on gender-specific attitudes and grappled with double standards of maintaining beauty and a feminine image. Further, many of these married women also moved into the political arena, challenging political corruption and advocating for women's rights, equal pay in the workplace, and more educational opportunities for women.

Chapter two analyzes how single women in Nebraska and the Dakotas navigated beyond the national ideals of marriage and a family. Despite a majority of national and local articles calling to single women to settle down and find the perfect mate, many pushed beyond these norms to find fulfillment in their lives. Many chose to remain single to continue their education, allowing them to be employed in more professional careers. Though barraged with strict sex norms within magazines and newspapers, many single women explored their sexuality outside of marriage, shocking the nation by their willingness to navigate their lives outside of societal expectations. Featuring local articles that showcased many opinions and writings on abortions and children's homes, this thesis also highlights that many single women were taking control of their bodies in their choices to have sex, raise children out of wedlock, and have abortions at increasing rates.

Adding another layer to understanding gender roles and expectations in the Great Plains during the 1950s, chapter three offers analysis of men and ideas of masculinity in the region during a decade that was labeled as having a "masculinity crisis." Throughout the 1950s, many books and articles pointed to a loss of masculinity in men, blaming

“Momism” and the overaggressiveness of women. However, despite the perceived loss of masculinity brought on by men helping more around the house and working in an ever-growing capitalist society, many men reimagined and renegotiated masculine spaces, creating new ideas of what it meant to be masculine. Though they often faced conflicting messages, and traditional accounts of men in the 1950s often show them as the main breadwinners who left the domestic duties to the women, local sentiments highlight that many were content to help around the house and did not feel threatened by the women in their lives.

Finally, the conclusion inspects the long-lasting effect that advertisements continue to have on society in maintaining specific roles and ideals. This work offers an important and new gendered regional analysis that highlights that both national magazines and national and local newspapers during the 1950s contained significant mixed messages on gender roles, despite being seen as a decade of fixed gender roles and strict national expectations

CHAPTER I

MARRIED WITH CHILDREN… AND A JOB?: MARRIED WOMEN ON THE PLAINS, 1950-1959

During the 1950s, approximately sixty percent of women were married in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. For women in the U.S., maintaining traditional roles as mothers and housewives became the national expectation. Local and national advertisements and articles within newspapers and magazines were influential in the attempt to position women solely in the home. Still, many women successfully navigated outside of this sphere. Throughout the era, the percentage of women workers rose dramatically. In the Midwest, much like the rest of the U.S., the American government, working together with local governments and mass media, attempted multiple campaigns to solidify women's roles as housewives and mothers. Despite these attempts, married women increasingly engaged in work outside of the home and became active individuals in the construction of cultural life and social activism. Women on the Plains, particularly married women, were especially active in these roles.

To envision the emphasis of married life in the post-war era of the 1950s, magazine articles and advertisements provide overwhelming insight. Nationally circulated magazines, such as *The Saturday Evening Post, Life, McCall's, Time,* and the *Ladies Home Journal,* contained numerous articles and advertisements that focused on married women and how they should take care of their households, husbands, children, and themselves. Marriage advice columns and articles in magazines often idealized the perfect housewife and urged readers to strive for this lifestyle. One advice column,

written by psychologist Clifford R. Adams, could be found throughout the 1950s in *Ladies Home Journal*. In his columns, Adams relayed how a woman was expected to behave and how she should remain happy in her prearranged societal role. The societal pressure of finding a husband was even more complex. Women were conditioned from a very young age to find a man, get married, and raise children to create a nuclear family. During the 1950s, about half of all brides married right out of high school or college, usually around the age of nineteen.

[1] Though women often had other goals in life, with the dominant theme promoted in the media and in the national identity being to find a husband and create a family, women's own aspirations usually fell by the wayside. This is especially true when considering what younger female readers saw within magazines. For example, the magazine *Seventeen* offered assertions that "[t]here is no office, lab, or stage that offers so many creative avenues or executive opportunities as that everyday place, the home."[2]

In his marriage advice column "Making Marriage Work" in *Ladies' Home Journal*, Adams promoted that it was the woman's job to both secure a man and to keep him happy. To Adams, the ultimate end goal of any relationship was marriage and a family. Throughout the 1950s, women wrote to Adams soliciting his advice on what to do if a man would not ask for marriage, convinced, as Adam's wrote, "[m]arriage is a dream for any woman…Planning a wedding is what every woman looks forward to once

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[1] Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 9.

[2] Ibid, 10.

she is engaged."[3] There were also certain qualities and expectations that society placed on women to ensure that they made themselves suitable for the ideal marriage. Women were expected to be feminine, happy, and well-balanced. To be truly feminine meant that women did not want higher education, careers, or independence, political rights, or opportunities.[4] A woman not meeting this criteria often would be considered a radical and those unmarried by thirty years of age were what Adams called an "old maid." In his articles, Adams claimed that "[o]nce a woman hits that age her chances of finding men within her age group are very slim unless she made some fundamental changes to herself. For after this age, men suitable for her become steadily fewer, while the traits that interfered with her marrying become more fixed and more obvious."[5] In this respect, Adams clearly told women that if they were thirty years old and still single something was wrong with them, something that needed to be fixed immediately to be able to find a man to marry. To rectify these wrongdoings, Adams suggested that women should make physical changes to their appearance to become more femininely appealing.[6]

Behavior was also paramount in Adams' opinion, along with many other advice column writers. A good wife, he wrote, "adapts her mood to her husbands," and "conceals her disappointments."[7] Women should show no personal emotion of her own,

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[3] Clifford R. Adams, "Making Marriage Work," *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1952.

[4] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 16.

[5] Clifford R. Adams, "Making Marriage Work," *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1951.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Clifford R. Adams, "Making Marriage Work," *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1955.

rather she should display an upbeat attitude to make her husband feel secure and happy. To show emotion would disrupt a happy marriage and create marital issues.

The ability to cook was also important. In Adams' view, if a woman could not cook, she would not be able to properly fulfill her duty as a wife. With the assumption that all women enjoyed cooking and wished to spend their days within the kitchen, Adams wrote, "With common sense and a good cookbook a bride soon learns to prepare adequate meals."[8] Men were not expected to prepare meals nor were they at the focal point of making a relationship successful. All was directed at women.

Once married, the expectation was that women stayed inside the home, being domestic caretakers and dependent on men. Adams' assertion in April 1955 that, "The man is primarily responsible for earning a living, the woman for running a home…she is concerned with recipes, and menus, techniques of child care and perhaps style in decorating or landscaping," mirrored much of the national sentiment in the 1950s.[9] The woman's place was clearly in the home. Careers outside of such would be considered unfeminine and neglectful. Females would be judged if they were not able to perform in the kitchen as "The success and value of a woman were to be measured only by the domestic aspects of feminine existence that society created."[10]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Clifford R. Adams, "Making Marriage Work," *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1955.

[10] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 43.

Matching Adams' sentiments in "Making Marriage Work," articles like "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead" in *Coronet* provided suggestions on how women could be good wives and please their husbands all through their actions. According to "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead," writer Mrs. Dale Carnegie reminded women that comfort "is man's major requirement" and lack of proper order and cleanliness within the home will "drive a man to poolrooms, saloons, and blondes."[11] She also asserted that husbands need to be "left alone" to be "set free from all female demands and constraint," and it is the wife's duty to make sure that he gets these "happy moments of aloneness."[12]

Advertisements within widely circulated magazines during the 1950s also instructed women on their proper place, both directly and indirectly. Boasting labor-saving technology and updated beauty and fashion, ads constantly barraged women with ways to end "washday drudgery," to make cooking simpler, and to keep their hands "pretty" even after washing "22,000 dishes a year."[13] The most telling advertisements, however, feature women situated in the housekeeping role. A 1956 Singer vacuum cleaner advertisement prominently displays a woman clad in a neat dress, well-done hair,

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[11] Mrs. Dale Carnegie, "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead," in *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy Walker (Bedford/St. Martins, 1998), 126-136.

[12] "How To Help Your Husband Get Ahead," 133.

[13] Kelvinator, "New Way to End Washday Drudgery," 1954; Jergens Lotion, "I wash 22,000 dishes a year." 1953.

and perfectly applied makeup happily vacuuming the floor as her husband looks on in his suit and tie and their daughter sits calmly in the background.[14]

With articles and advertisements of the 1950s overwhelmingly focused on creating a national identity of domestic life and a nuclear family in a time of uncertainty, it appeared that the nation as a whole fit nicely in this carefully pre-determined mold. However, this was not the case. On the Plains, married women would find themselves juxtaposed between national societal and familial norms and a contrasting Midwest experience with an ever-developing Midwest identity. Life on the Plains was often far different than the image of the white, middle-class suburbanite lifestyle seen throughout national magazines. Married women in the Dakotas and Nebraska during the 1950s often found themselves pinched in the middle between what was expected and what needed to get done. Articles in local newspapers often carried national advice columns on one page and stories of hard-working women on another. In lands where everyday life relied heavily on farming, women were often looked upon to aid in family work on the farm. With declining farm work in the 1950s, moreover, married women often worked outside of the home and engaged in the public and political sphere.

Newspapers of the Plains in the 1950s supply considerable insight into the expectations, mindset, roles, and challenges of married women in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. In North Dakota, the *Bismarck Tribune* constituted one of the largest newspaper circulations as the state's capital newspaper. In 1950, the urban area of

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[14] Singer, "Roll-a-Magic Vacuum Cleaner," *Woman's Home Companion*, December 1956, 70.

Bismarck boasted a population of 18,640, with 9,827 of the population being female. Of those women, 28% were employed and over sixty percent were married.[15] Like many other newspapers across the nation, the *Bismarck Tribune* included widely read articles by syndicated columnist Ruth Millett. In her advice columns, Millett took a more moderate platform on the expectations of married women, providing an interesting contrast to magazine articles such as those written by Adams. On the question of how much a woman should cater to her husband, Millett asserted that women were being misled and "The wife's best way is to take the middle road to please a man in the ways that are important to him without giving him the idea that she hasn't any other ambition or goal in life. And she should please herself part of the time, too, by expecting him to put her preferences first now and then."[16] Millett sometimes qualified her own advice about assertive women. For example, she asserted that it is never smart for a woman to "[c]omplain about her troubles," "[s]ulk to get her own way," or "[m]ake comments on her husband's thinning hair or expanding waistline." Yet, at the same time she also said a wife must not "[p]ut off all her own interests until the children are older," as by this time "she may have become so bogged down in domesticity she hasn't enough get-up-and-go to take advantage of her own leisure."[17]

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[15] United States Census Bureau, "Census of Population and Housing, North Dakota 1950."

[16] Ruth Millett, "Wives Have Been Misled About Catering to Husbands," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), March 19, 1952.

[17] Ruth Millett, *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), March 24, 1953.

In a 1953 article by national columnist Hal Boyle, included in the *Bismarck Tribune*, North Dakota women were again barraged with the importance of being domestic. In his article entitled "How to Glamorize Household Chores," Boyle asserted that "The most desirable feminine career today is unquestionably marriage," yet he noted most women do not care to list their occupation as housewife.[18] The remedy to this, Boyle said, was for a woman to call herself a homemaker, rather than a housewife, as a homemaker "places emphasis upon the home, and implies so much more."[19] Likewise, in 1950, an article in the *Steele County Press* asserted that in North Dakota, housewives outnumbered women in all other roles, with the average of 66 percent exceeding the national average of 61 percent.[20]

Still, articles in local papers such as these provide a contrasting outlook of what women considered a career. Statewide in 1950, 20,995 married women in North Dakota were in the labor force with 28 percent out of every 100 married women working in retail jobs, 26 percent in professional services, 13 percent working on farms, and 12 percent working in personal service work.[21] By 1960, 35,965 married women were in the workforce, a majority of whom were clerical, kindred, and service workers. Though

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[18] Hal Boyle, "How to Glamorize Household Chores," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), March 25, 1953.

[19] Ibid.

[20] "Predict Homemaking to Top All Pursuits of N.D. Women in '50," *Steele County Press* (Finley, ND), February 9, 1950.

[21] "Occupational Outlook Information Series: Employment by Industry and Occupation," US Veterans Administration, 38.

North Dakota's women labor force participation rate of about 15 percent in 1950 and around 26 percent in 1960 may seem small, when compared to the size and population of other states, it is quite extensive. National averages during this time assert that out of the 63.4 percent of married women, 23.8 percent in 1950 and 30.5 percent by 1960.[22]

The steady decline in the number and size of farms in North Dakota throughout the 1950s underscore the significance of these numbers. In 1950, the number of farms in the state went from 65,401 to 61,943 in 1954 and down to 54,928 by 1959. Similarly, the number of farms with family workers also decreased across these years: in 1950, 48,813 farms used family workers only; in 1954, 43,321 used family workers only; and by 1959 this number had decreased to 40,083. In Burleigh county, which encompassed the city of Bismarck, the average farm size decreased from 1,136 acres in 1950 to 1,022 acres by 1959. In Steele County, the average farm size decreased from 903 acres in 1950 to 775 acres by 1959. Although less steep, Billings County saw decline with 380 acres of farmlands in 1950 to 315 by 1959.[23] As early as 1951, the U.S. government was pondering ways to sustain family farms. A Steele County Press article entitled "What is Future of U.S. Family Farm," asserted that the Department of Agriculture was looking for ways to serve the family farm better and believed that "family farms should be

[22] U.S. Department of Commerce, *A Statistical Portrait of Women in the United States*, Bureau of the Census, April 1976.

[23] USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive, "US Census of Agriculture: North Dakota, 1959."

encouraged to expand and increase their production within the pattern of family farming around them."[24]

However, the changes in farms meant a decline in family farms as farms expanded to more acres of land and women searched outside of this realm for paid work to sustain their families. The number of farms in North Dakota that had 1,000 acres or more went up from 14,895,309 acres in 1950 to 19,247,351 acres in 1959. With this, the number of tractors similarly increased to aid in production, rising from 98,676 in 1950 to 124,697 in 1959.[25] With the increase in farm aiding equipment came a significant decline in family workers, despite the acreage of farms increasing. In 1950, the number of farms with family workers was only 48,813. By 1959, this number had decreased to 40,083.[26] Further, since North Dakota's production focused more on grain production, which called for more mechanized harvesting, women were needed less in the fields.[27] More married women looked outside of the family farm and home to sustain their families, both in formal and informal ways.

In the more rural areas, such as Steele County in eastern North Dakota and Billings County in western North Dakota, farming was paramount to survival. In 1952,

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[24] "What is Future of U.S. Family Farm," *Steele County Press* (Finley, ND), August 2, 1951.

[25] USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive, "US Census of Agriculture: North Dakota, 1959."

[26] Ibid.

[27] Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in the Rural Midwest," *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 3 (1994): 566.

the *Hope Pioneer* of Steele County contained an article that asserted farm wives equaled their spouses in crop know-how as they were "growing out of the kitchen into [a] full working partnership with husbands."[28] Yet, if a woman were to turn the pages to the "Woman's World" section within the same newspaper, she would see countless tips on how to be a good housewife. However, these columns, written by Ertta Haley and found across the Great Plains, focused more on house tips and creating clothing and meals, rather than on advice like those written by Ruth Millett. Such articles as "Dresses Made at Home Can Achieve Professional Look" and "Household Memos" by Lynn Chambers, instructed women on how to make a proper dress or how to make the best lemon méringue pie.[29]

An analysis of the *Billings County Pioneer* in Beach, North Dakota throughout the 1950s presents an interesting and changing view on married women. Like the *Hope Pioneer*, during the early 1950s, articles instructing women on proper homemaking and how to create the best look for themselves were included in the woman's section. However, by the late 1950s, articles shifted to show women in working roles. In November 1956, the *Billings County Pioneer* included an article entitled "Working Wife Becomes Strong Real Estate Factor," stating that "One out of three of today's homemakers not only plays a key part in selecting her home, but paying for it as well….The working wife has had a part in boosting the average family income 30 per

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[28] "Farm Wife May Equal Spouse in Crop Know-How," *Hope Pioneer* (Hope, North Dakota), May 15, 1952.

[29] *Hope Pioneer* and *Billings County Pioneer* (Beach, ND), January 1952.

cent – from $4,000 in 1946 to $5,200 in 1955." This article emphasized that "This is one of the most striking developments in the American economy since World War II, and promises to be even more important in the future."[30] This view of woman as paid workers can again be connected to the decline in farming. In December 1956, a *Billings County Pioneer* article, "'Drastic Change' Needed to Save Farmers," detailed that North Dakota agricultural income would "continue to decline unless there is a 'drastic change' in national farm policy" and "the decline in the farmers' position is definitely continuing despite the propaganda to the contrary."[31] North Dakota women, it seemed, stepped into the role of wage earner to help boost the family farm income.

Ruth Millett also changed her tune towards working women by the end of the decade. In a September 1957 article in the *Bismarck Tribune* entitled, "Is Your Wife Working?," she explained that "a working wife has a more independent attitude than a stay at home wife," which makes her "feel more like a full-fledged partner and less like the dependent 'little woman.'" Further, the husband would have to help around the house and be less dependent on his wife to listen to his woes.[32] Millett recognized changing circumstances for married couples in rural North Dakota. Moreover, while the national identity asserted that it was taboo for working women to like their jobs, rural women in

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[30] "Working Wife Becomes Strong Real Estate Factor, *Billings County Pioneer*, November 8, 1956.

[31] "'Drastic Change' Needed to Save Farmers," *Billings County Pioneer*, December 6, 1956.

[32] Ruth Millett, "Is Your Wife Working?," *Bismarck Tribune*, September 27, 1957.

North Dakota claimed the opposite. According to one woman, "The six years I have held down a full-time job have been the happiest and most rewarding of my life….My job enabled us to make a down payment on a big, old house we love. We have been able to buy a TV set the whole family enjoys. We have a car."[33]

In South Dakota, much like its northern neighbor North Dakota, analyses of local newspapers provide a clear view of the changing expectations of married women compared to the national portrait. In 1950, 48 percent of women of the total 318,330 were married and 16 percent were employed in the workforce.[34] In the southeastern city of Sioux Falls, which encompassed the largest population of the state in 1950 with 52,696 people, the local newspaper, the *Argus-Leader*, contained countless articles on married women throughout the 1950s. Many of these articles focused on working women and their place in society. In February 1951, the *Argus-Leader* included an article entitled, "Uncle Sam Needs New Pool of Womanpower to Handle Future Defense Production." This article asserted that after WWII, women did not simply "go home and stay there," rather the percentage of married women working had risen over ten percent from 1940.[35] In 1953, another article boasted that women held themselves back in thinking that homemaking is more important than a career. According to the article, "few women consider a career more important than husband, children and a home," yet "there are

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[33] Ruth Millett, "Can Wife Say She Likes Job?," *Bismarck Tribune*, July 26, 1958.

[34] United States Census Bureau, "1950 Census of Population: Volume 1, South Dakota."

[35] "Uncle Sam Needs New Pool of Womanpower to Handle Future Defense Production," *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), February 4, 1951.

more working women in America today than ever before," and they had a mindset where they rarely "put their hearts wholly in their jobs," only holding themselves back in growing a successful career.[36]

With the increase in working women came articles on how to handle them in the workplace. Research conducted by a former Sioux Falls woman and reproduced within an article in the *Argus-Leader* provided some interesting, and often demeaning, advice on working with women. According to Mrs. Rush A. Brown, women tend to "take things personally"[37] since they are so often on the defensive and feel a constant need to prove themselves. They are also sensitive, needing "praise in greater quantities than do men."[38] Overall, she said, working women need handling that is careful and non-critical, and it should be expected that they need extra care in every situation.

Another *Argus-Leader* article from 1954 asserted that working women should pay extra attention to both their health and their appearance. According to this article, a working woman, always on view to those around her, should be "extra attentive to her health and appearance" as "the way she looks reflects on her poise and self confidence and may even mean an increase in salary."[39] Likewise, a 1953 "We the Women" article in the *Rapid City Journal*, pondered the importance of beauty for working women,

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[36] "Women Hold Selves Back," *Argus-Leader*, July 21, 1953.

[37] "How to Handle Women," *Argus-Leader*, March 22, 1953.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Working Should Watch Health, Appearance," *Argus-Leader*, October 20, 1954.

arguing that working women should be able to deduct beauty costs from their income taxes. Ruth Millett's article called a "logical argument," suggested that "[i]t is just as important for secretaries and other working women to look pretty on the job" as it is for movie and television stars.[40] Interestingly, she also asserted that this should be allowed for *all* women: the woman that holds a job and the woman who is a housewife.

These articles are important and extremely telling. While married and working women often grappled with double standards of maintaining beauty and keeping a gender-specific attitude, the magnitude of articles on married working women within South Dakota highlight a consistency in engagement outside of the home sphere. Rather than emphasizing that women should stay within the home, articles showcased that many women were migrating into the workplace. A December 1954 article entitled "It's Official Now…Women Can Do All Men's Work," shows that, despite the national assertion that women should stay at home, "30 per cent of all workers in the United States are women" and "Women are now in all the 446 occupations that the Census reports."[41] A similar article earlier in the year spoke of the importance of working wives for the family income, claiming that if women were to quit their jobs and go back to being housewives, "the take-home pay of many families would drop appreciably – and painfully."[42]

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[40] Ruth Millet, "We the Women," *Rapid City Journal* (Rapid City, South Dakota), May 17, 1953.

[41] "It's Official Now…Women Can Do All Men's Work," *Rapid City Journal*, December 19, 1954.

[42] "Working Wives More Than Wartime Peak," *Rapid City Journal*, August 15, 1954.

In the late 1950s, not only did calls for working women amp up, but rather than arguing for or against women in the workplace, many rallied for a better use of women's skills within the workplace. In a *Rapid City Journal* article entitled "Importance of Working Women Emphasized," the writer, Cynthia Lowry, pondered what would happen if women who worked in Rapid City stayed home all day. She concluded that the city "would probably lose 75 per cent of its teachers, 90 per cent of the nurses, several hundred secretaries, bookkeepers and Girl Fridays, many stores would have to close."[43] In the same year, an *Argus-Leader* article asserted that the working woman "holds the balance of power in our nation's economic structure; tomorrow she will be the one major manpower pool to be tapped in a probable period of shortage."[44] Anticipating an expanding demand for labor, the article nevertheless noted that, "Despite these hard facts, the modern woman's place outside the home is marked by paradox and marred by inefficiency in the use of her skills."[45] Since almost 28 million women were working by this time, with three out of five being married, the economy would have collapsed had these women quit working. Yet, this article asserted that employers continued to be narrow-minded in their view of the work that women could do. To address this problem,

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[43] "Importance of Working Women Emphasized," *Rapid City Journal*, September 23, 1957.

[44] "Femme Workers: Womanpower Tops in Labor Pool But Skills Not Used Efficiently," *Argus-Leader*, October 16, 1958.

[45] Ibid.

according to Lowry, employers needed to "get rid of 'myths' and 'misconceptions'" and continue to employ women in high numbers for a variety of jobs.[46]

Advertisements in local newspapers also mirrored women's continued and substantial role within the workplace. A nylon stocking ad in 1958 pictured a woman on one side and a man on another and asserted that the stocking was for working women and working men "who spend time on your feet."[47] Likewise, a shoe advertisement in the *Deadwood Pioneer-Times* proclaimed, "We're proud of our friendship with the countless intelligent and hard-working women who insist on the quality, comfort and fashion of the Clinic shoe."[48]

At the same time, the *Argus-Leader* included an article that asked men "are you prejudiced against women?" and pondered whether American men were fair to women. According to the article, prejudice against women remained due to their innate differences from men and the fact that they tended to hold themselves back. The article, riddled with double standards, stated that women have the same educational opportunities as men and can thus "reach the same status as her male counterpart," yet "[w]omen probably never will compete with men in every walk of life."[49] The article concluded that there is "some" prejudice against women, but "that prejudice very often serves to

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Spuntex Supp-hose, *Argus-Leader*, November 2, 1958.

[48] F and M Bootery, "The Clinic Shoe," *Deadwood Pioneer-Times* (Deadwood, South Dakota), March 13, 1959.

[49] "Are American Men Fair to Women?," *Argus-Leader*, January 19, 1958.

strengthen the American home."[50] Interestingly, the article seemed to celebrate women and their newfound places within the work place while also solidifying them as different from their male counterparts and failing in their wifely duties.

Meanwhile, in the Plains state of Nebraska, much like its northern Dakota neighbors, married women found themselves facing declining farm revenues and an increase in changing ideals about women working outside of the home. Of the 660,000 women in Nebraska in 1950, nearly 51 percent were married and almost 20 percent were in the workforce.[51] Interestingly, the need for married women workers in Nebraska during the 1950s can be viewed within the classified advertisements of local newspapers. Countless "help wanted' ads within the *Lincoln Journal Star* asserted a penchant for married women as early as 1951. One particular ad, calling for car hops and inside workers for the late evening hours, announced that they "prefer[ed] married women."[52] Other classified ads within the same year called for married women to take special courses through the Lincoln School of Commerce to aid family income in office positions.[53] However, though these classified advertisements are interesting with their specific call to married women, many of the job positions denote a restriction in jobs allotted to married women in the early 1950s. In 1950, trade and service jobs were the

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[50] Ibid.

[51] United States Census Bureau, "Census of Population and Housing, Nebraska 1950."

[52] "Car Hops and Inside Workers," *Lincoln Journal Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), January 23, 1951.

[53] "Married Women," *Lincoln Journal Star*, January 28, 1951.

main source of income for Nebraskan women with about 26 percent involved in clerical work, nearly 15 percent involved in service work, and approximately 9 percent employed in sales work. Further, over 7 percent of married women were employed in farming.[54]

Like the decline in farms in the Dakotas during the 1950s, Nebraska also saw a similar downward trend. In 1950, the number of farms in Nebraska was 107,183 to 90,475 by 1959, decreasing by about 2,000 per year between 1950 to 1960.[55] With this decline in farms, similar to other areas on the Plains, married women turned to working outside the home to supplement the family income. A Nebraskan woman, writing to the *Columbus Telegram* in 1952, argued that "To many families the wife's earnings mean the difference between bare subsistence and more adequate family support. In some cases the additional income enables the family to buy or make improvements on a home….it provides the extra money needed for educating sons and daughters."[56] She added that this information "Makes a person wonder whether there isn't a flaw or two in the slogan 'we've never had it so good,'" as despite the "billions of paper money in circulation than ever before," more married women are "working outside the home to help income meet expenses."[57]

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[54] "Census of Population and Housing, Nebraska 1950."

[55] USDA Census of Agriculture Historical Archive, "US Census of Agriculture: Nebraska, 1959."

[56] *The Columbus Telegram* (Columbus, Nebraska), September 20, 1952.

[57] Ibid.

Yet, through analyzing local newspapers in Nebraska, contrasting views of married working women are presented. In 1956, Ruthe Rosenquist, a local writer for the *Lincoln Journal Star*, explained the positive benefits of being a working married woman. According to Rosenquist, the Nebraska census revealed that there were three times as many married working women compared to single working women. After interviewing women in Lincoln, she detailed that many found considerable benefit in working as they are able to make "contacts with the outside world," have "'more to talk about over the dinner table,'" and more time to share interests with husbands. Further, working outside of the home allowed women to "stay out of her 'mental rut' by working at a job that interests her."[58]

Conversely, late into the 1950s, Ruth Millett's "We, The Women" articles can be found within local Nebraska newspapers, boasting a continuation of traditional domestic roles for women. One August 1958 article argues that married despite the large percentage of married women working, mothers should not give their daughters the idea that she should prepare herself to earn a living. Rather, "the most important training a girl can have….is to develop those skills and talents that will enable her to be a good wife, a good mother, an efficient homemaker, and a happy outgoing person who can make and keep friends."[59] Millett added that, "Certainly, a great many married women

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[58] Ruthe Rosenquist, "Gals Board Gravy Train," *Lincoln Journal Star*, November 20, 1956.

[59] Ruth Millett, "We, The Women," *Beatrice Daily Sun* (Beatrice, Nebraska), August 18, 1958.

today hold down jobs. But a great many of them don't have to. They are working for luxuries – not for necessities" and in doing so they are giving up the real happiness in life – "concentrating on making a good home, on helping a husband find his success and being at home to care for their children."[60]

Later, in the same year, the *Beatrice Daily Sun* pondered "Is a wife's job really worth it?" Debating statistics, the article argued that taxes and other expenses "eat more heavily into income" when both partners are working with "the working wife in such cases …lucky to net 49 per cent of what she earns."[61] Due to this, men argued that this "proved wives should stay home." Women, however, argued both that the figures "proved that work paid off for the wife" and that "maybe if the wife didn't work…the total family income would be even greater."[62]

These contrasting views within two local Nebraskan newspapers can be explained when population characteristics are considered. In 1950, Lincoln, Nebraska had a population of 113,125 women, around 49 percent of which were married. Of those women, 30 percent were working. Beatrice, Nebraska, however, had a population of 6,244 women, with over 50 percent being married. Of those women, only 25 percent were working.[63] Further, throughout the 1950s, only 16,703 women in Lincoln did not work. By 1960, 31 percent of married women were employed in Lincoln compared to

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[60] Ibid.

[61] "Is a Wife's Job Really Worth It?," *Beatrice Daily Sun*, December 14, 1958,

[62] Ibid.

[63] United States Census Bureau, "Census of Population and Housing, Nebraska 1950."

the 28 percent in Beatrice.[64] Though both urbanized areas, Beatrice, sitting 40 miles south of Lincoln and surrounded by agricultural land, depended more upon farming for its income compared to the industrialized city of Lincoln.

A comparison of the "Help Wanted" ads in both the *Lincoln Journal Star* and the *Beatrice Daily Sun* further solidify the positions of women working. The *Lincoln Journal Star* called for women to work in a mixture of jobs, ranging from lab technicians, experienced bookkeeping machine operators, manager-trainees, and trained salesladies.[65] Again, preference was given to married women. In Beatrice, however, "Help Wanted" ads focused primarily on jobs closely related to homemaking. For example, the March 16, 1959 edition of the *Beatrice Daily Sun* included ads calling for women to sew for money, to work-from-home either answering phone calls or making sales over the phone, "egg breaking" jobs (where women would literally crack open eggs five days a week), and Sunday School jobs.[66] This contrast, coupled with the inclusion of certain articles within both local newspapers, details an interesting deviation from the national identity. Rather than large urbanized areas in Nebraska, like Lincoln, conforming to nationalized gender roles, smaller urbanized areas, such as Beatrice, seemed to fit into this narrative.

Local articles in Fremont, Nebraska mirrored much of the same sentiments of those in Beatrice. Roughly the same size as Beatrice and situated about 40 miles

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[64] United States Census Bureau, "Characteristics of the Population, Nebraska 1960."

[65] These advertisements are found throughout the 1950s in the *Lincoln Star* and *Lincoln Journal Star*. This particular range of jobs listed can be found within the June 12, 1955 edition of the *Lincoln Star*.

[66] *Beatrice Daily Sun*, March 16, 1959.

northeast of Omaha, about 26 percent of women in Fremont were working in 1950. Despite the number of women workers, articles as late as 1959 pondered whether women should be working and if they wished they could turn back time to choose a different past. In an article entitled, "To Work or Not to Work Question For Both Young, Older Housewife," Vivian Brown interviewed 10 working married women to determine whether women should continue to work after marriage and if it was worth doing so. According to Brown, "Nine of these girls between 23 and 37 felt if they had it to do over again they would not work." In this article, the women cited feeling neglectful of their children and being "forced to maintain our good position in the community."[67] "Help Wanted" ads aimed at women in Fremont matched those of Beatrice, calling on homemakers to become paid dishwashers, waitresses, work the night shift in the boning and eviscerating departments at the Campbell Soup Company, and work as salesladies in children's clothing stores.[68]

Articles found throughout the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska challenge the national messages circulated during the late 1950s. For example, *Life* magazine debuted an entire magazine special on American woman and her achievements and troubles in their December 24, 1956 edition. Displaying a working mother spending time with her daughter on the cover, this edition contained articles ranging from successes of women in politics and the workplace to chastising feminism.

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[67] Vivian Brown, "To Work or Not to Work Question For Both Young, Older Housewife," *Fremont Tribune* (Fremont, Nebraska), July 18, 1959.

[68] These advertisements are found throughout the late 1950s in the *Fremont Tribune*. This range of jobs listed can be found within the April 25, 1959 edition.

In the article “She Needs Some Years of Grace,” Emily Kimbrough asserted that despite criticism of women working outside of the home and breaking the old patterns of life, “I would not for a moment suggest that all women should or could be successful jugglers of two careers. But when opportunity or inclination beckons, the American woman has shown repeatedly that she can handle responsibilities outside the home.”[69]

However, much like the contradicting images seen within different newspaper issues across the Plains, in the same issue of *Life*, an article entitled “Changing Roles in Modern Marriage” rebuked women for stepping outside of their perceived roles, stating that ideas of feminism and the idea of a “career woman” have caused divorce rate spikes. Further, the step away from traditional gendered roles created a “masculinized mother and feminized father” which would repeat throughout generations and cause an increase in male homosexuality.[70] Likewise, the article “Women are Misguided” suggested that women are trying to set themselves up “as a race apart and special,” allowing them to “lose many of the delights and fulfillments of being women.”[71]

Views on different kinds of work – political activism and participation and involvement in community programs – however, were increasingly positive throughout both national magazines and local newspapers. National magazines, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Coronet* heralded married women for

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[69] Emily Kimbrough, “She Needs Some Years of Grace,” *Life*, December 24, 1956.

[70] Robert Coughlan, “Changing Roles in Modern Marriage,” *Life*, December 24, 1956, 108-118.

[71] Cornelia Otis Skinner, “Women are Misguided,” *Life*, December 24, 1956, 75.

being engaged as political and community leaders, with the *Ladies' Home Journal* leading the way with its continued support, despite being largely against feminist rhetoric.[72] Local newspapers in the Dakotas and Nebraska highlight the growing argument of whether women should be involved outside the home. As early as 1950, Bismarck woman Mrs. Elton Gray ran for North Dakota state treasurer and asserted that "there is a 'definite place' for women in politics."[73] Gray further argued that the stigma of women in politics is aged, and since "People are 'in politics' whether they like it or not and whether they know it or not," women need to solidify their place among general participation in government affairs.[74] Gray's sentiments were matched in a *Lincoln Journal Star* article in 1950 where Georgia Neese Clark, the treasurer of the U.S., urged women in Omaha to "get out and do more in politics and business" since they have "the weight of numbers on their side."[75]

However, while these particular women highlight individual success in the area of politics and urged women to push their way into this predominantly male sphere, articles on women entering the political arena found within local newspapers often emphasized both moving beyond their domestic roles and utilizing such to further their agenda. Many articles found across the Dakotas and Nebraska concerning women in politics

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[72] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1467.

[73] "Place for Women in Politics," *Bismarck Tribune*, April 25, 1950.

[74] Ibid.

[75] "Treasurer of U.S. Urges Women in Politics," *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 12, 1950.

highlighted specific women who had moved beyond their housewife duties to make a mark in government affairs. In 1957, the *Rapid City Journal* included an article on South Dakota women involved in the organization of a Republican Workshop aimed at getting women involved in politics. Particular emphasis in this article was the group's President, Marion Hersrud, who was heralded as a "dynamic housewife from Lemmon – a true example of the adage 'Never underestimate the power of a woman.'"[76] Likewise, a year prior, the *Argus-Leader* ran an article titled "Average S.F. Housewife Finds Time To Be Active Worker in Her Precinct," highlighting the story of "average housewife" Mrs. Axel Christensen who among her busy schedule of "caring for her home and four children," found time to be president of the Labor Auxiliary 304 and delegate to the South Dakota Federation of Trades and Labor.[77]

A 1955 *Lincoln Journal Star* article on three women holding jobs as county officials in Lincoln matched the emphasis on women working within politics while also accentuating their roles and mothers and housewives. According to the article, county clerk Mary Schmal, county superintendent Belle Robertson, and District Court clerk Elsie Wood, all balanced raising families and housework while working toward their political roles. The article stated Mrs. Robertson "worked six of the 11 years of her married life" and managed "to do her housework on holidays and after work." Similarly, Wood waited

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[76] "S.D. Housewife Heads Women's Political Group," *Rapid City Journal*, September 15, 1957.

[77] "Average S.F. Housewife Finds Time To Be Active Worker in Her Precinct," *Argus-Leader*, October 22, 1956.

until her husband passed away to begin her business career and great emphasis was given in the article to her two sons and their attendance at the University of Nebraska and Fairbury Junior College.[78]

Interestingly, many articles throughout the latter half of the 1950s in the Dakotas and Nebraska credited women with being largely responsible for the elimination of corruption at every level of government. In a 1955 national article included in both the *Lead Daily Call* and the *Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, Bernard M. Shanley, special counsel to President Dwight Eisenhower, addressed nearly 600 women at a luncheon and asserted that women "'are entitled to primary credit in cleaning up politics,'" driving corruption from towns and cities in what he considered "'the greatest contribution….that has been made to our country in this generation.'"[79] Governor of Wyoming, Milward Simpson, mirrored Shanley's words in the same year stating that politics is in need of more women as they are "largely responsible for the elimination of much of the previous corruption in the federal and state governments."[80]

The increased involvement of women in politics can be largely credited to the influx of more women working outside the home. Moving into the workforce with more fervency, their jobs offered them an organizational base for political activity. This was

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[78] "Three Women in Jefferson County Enjoy Official Job," *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 18, 1955.

[79] "Women Credited for Clean Politics," *Deadwood Pioneer-Times* and *Lead Daily Call*, January 8, 1955.

[80] "Women Needed in Politics Says Simpson," *Rapid City Journal*, May 18, 1955.

especially true in the area of equal pay. Throughout the 1950s, women throughout the nation worked tirelessly to promote equal pay laws – a fight that had been continuing since the late 1880s. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1950, female workers made $1,579 compared to the $2,702 that men made.[81] In 1952, the Women's Bureau held a conference on equal pay arguing that with nearly 19 million women workers in the U.S., equal pay "is a matter of grave concern and more should and will be heard of a rate for the job without regard for sex."[82] The report detailed that as of 1952, thirteen states – California, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey (passed in 1952), New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington – and the territory of Alaska, had equal pay laws. Montana and Michigan were the first two states to pass legislation on equal pay in 1919, though these laws were aimed at private employment as were the majority of the thirteen states. Michigan and Illinois, however, limited their equal pay to manufacturing. Further, sixteen states and Washington D.C. all had laws that asserted men and women teachers were to receive the same wage for comparable services.[83]

Although none of the three Great Plains states had equal pay laws, the issue appeared in local newspapers. In July 1952, the *Rapid City Journal* highlighted that New

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[81] "Census of Population: 1950. A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, V.4 pt.1."

[82] United States Women's Bureau, *Report of the National Conference on Equal Pay, March 31 and April 1, 1952: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 243*, 1.

[83] *Report of the National Conference on Equal Pay, March 31 and April 1, 1952: Women's Bureau Bulletin, No. 243*, 2.

Jersey had become the thirteenth to pass a law ensuring that women were paid the same as men for the same jobs and made it illegal for "an employer to pay a woman less for a particular job than the prevailing rate paid to men."[84] The article argued that though women have made remarkable gains since the 1900s with the right to vote and the rejection of many taboos, "until they achieve equality of economic opportunity with men," they still have a lot of road to travel.[85] A 1952 article in the *Lincoln Star* detailed a meeting for an "equal pay for equal work" bill. This bill was prompted by the recent passage of the New Jersey law and Frank Hienisch, an Omaha attorney in 1952, proposed legislation for business and professional women that would "prohibit discrimination in wages because of sex and would assure equal pay to women whose work requires the same skill and training as men."[86]

Throughout the year, businesswomen met with members of the state legislature to discuss the equal pay bill. However, by March 1953, legislation on equal pay for equal work had been narrowly defeated by a 20-18 vote. A *Columbus Telegram* article detailed the end to the bill as many farm women sat in the gallery and waited for its passage, only to leave disheartened.[87] Senators in Nebraska would not back another equal pay law until May 1957.[88] In 1959, Mrs. Donald W. Gerhard, a Lincoln YWCA board of director

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[84] "Equal Pay for Women," *Rapid City Journal*, July 15, 1952.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "Business Women Told of Pay Bill," *Lincoln Star*, August 17, 1952.

[87] "Equal Pay for Equal Work for Women Dies," *Columbus Telegram*, March 25, 1953.

[88] "Senators Back Policy of Equal Pay for Women," *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 8, 1957.

member and the Nebraska representative of the public affairs committee of the national board of the YWCA, traveled to New York to speak with 100 other YWCA members from across the world to argue for "political rights of women, access' of women to education, equal pay for equal work, economic opportunities and tax legislation."[89] However, despite many of these commissions and seminars taking place, by 1959, Nebraska women were still not afforded equal pay rights, though they did adopt a resolution that endorsed equal pay for equal work "without discrimination as to sex" and urged "the adoption of this policy by all employers in the State.[90]

In South Dakota, many women's clubs, especially the Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW), pushed for equal pay for equal work. Throughout the 1950s, South Dakota newspapers contained both local and national articles on the argument for equal pay for women. Testaments of U.S. Congress men and women and Presidential views on equal pay were especially highlighted across South Dakota. However, by 1958, South Dakota women were still working incredibly hard to even have an equal rights bill introduced. In June 1958, the South Dakota State Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs met to discuss continuing the battle "for the completion of

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[89] *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 15, 1959.

[90] Women's Bureau, *1958 Handbook on Women Workers: Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 266*, (U.S. Department of Labor, 1958), 118.

the equal right bill and the bill for equal pay for comparable work."[91] A year later, the BPW considered recommending an equal pay for equal work law.[92]

North Dakota newspapers were not as vocal as Nebraska and South Dakota on equal pay for women. Few articles exist on this issue, most displaying national interests. A 1956 *Bismarck Tribune* edition contained a brief article placing emphasis on an equal pay bill introduced by New York Senator Ives that would forbid "'discrimination because of sex.'"[93] A few months later, the *Tribune* included an article on Eisenhower's administration and how the Democratic-led Congress denounced his proposals on "equal pay for equal work regardless of sex," as they had largely "disappeared in congressional committees – committees controlled and guided by Democrats."[94]

The education of women also underscored significant activism for married women during the 1950s, both at a national and state level. In 1950, 19,380 women over the age of 25 in North Dakota had completed one to three years of college and 6,385 had completed four or more years. By 1960, 23,344 had completed one to three years and 6,886 had completed four or more years of college. Also, while women who attended college for one to three years far outnumbered that of men in the state, by over 57 percent

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[91] "Equal Rights Bill Remains Project of BPW Clubs," *Rapid City Journal*, June 09, 1958.

[92] "Areas of Service Outlined at State BPW Convention," *Rapid City Journal*, June 06, 1959.

[93] "Bill Would Grant Women Equal Pay," *Bismarck Tribune*, March 06, 1956.

[94] "Workers Never Had It Better, Secretary of Labor Declares," *Bismarck Tribune*, May 29, 1956.

in both 1950 and 1960, this was not the case for four or more years completed. In this area, men outnumbered women by 28 percent in 1950 and 62 percent in 1960.[95] In South Dakota, the number of women who completed one to three years of college also outnumbered men. In 1950, 22, 945 women over 25 had completed one to three years and by 1960, this number had reached 26, 974. Compared to men, this was 55 percent more in 1950 and 52 percent more in 1960. Like its northern neighbor, fewer women than men completed four or more years with 8, 075 women in 1950 and 8,152 women in 1960. Men outnumbered women in this area by 14 percent in 1950 and 34 percent by 1960.[96] Nebraska also matched these statistics. In 1950, 39,920 women had completed one to three years of college, 68 percent more than men. By 1960, this number rose to 51,029 which was 64 percent more than men. Again, for four or more years, men outnumbered women. In 1950, 21 percent more men completed four or years of college compared to women. By 1960, this number had rose to 33 percent.[97]

These numbers highlight a significant discrepancy and pinpoint the emphasis on domesticity and marriage during the 1950s. The national expectation was that women would attend college for a few years, focusing on taking courses to better hone their domestic skills and to better enable them to find a suitable mate. After completion of a

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[95] U.S. Census, "General Social and Economic Characteristics North Dakota, 1960," 127.

[96] U.S. Census, "General Social and Economic Characteristics South Dakota, 1960," 127.

[97] U.S. Census, "General Social and Economic Characteristics Nebraska, 1960," 149.

degree, women would usually hear a message such as: "The assignment for you as wives and mothers, has great advantages. It is homework, you can do it in the living room with a baby in your lap, or in the kitchen with a can-opener in your hands. If you're really clever, maybe you can even practice your saving arts on that unsuspecting husband while he's watching television."[98] This insistence on domesticity and marriage after a few years of college or even graduation, pushed women out of higher education and into the kitchen. According to Nancy Walker, college courses and curriculum were complicit in "steering young women to domestic lives rather than careers outside the home."[99] Additionally, the limited degrees available to them in graduate school, the unavailability of positions for women in substantial careers, and discrimination also deterred women from completing more years of college. In response to these issues, women became increasingly involved in organizations aimed at strengthening the position of women in education.

Newspaper articles throughout the 1950s in the Dakotas and Nebraska showcase the emphasis on bettering women's position in education, much of which was headed by married women. In early 1950, the *Argus-Leader* included an article on a local American Association of University Women (AAUW) meeting, led by Mrs. H. B. Crandall, which reported on discussions of what women would like to see done in the field of higher

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[98] Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 45.

[99] Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 197.

education. According to the article, discussions held at this event and others across the nation would aid in helping Dr. Margaret Mead incorporate the results into a book about education for women.[100] The AAUW meetings were held yearly (though luncheons were held monthly), and continuously featured proposed legislation concerning federal aid to schools and participation of and discrimination against women in economic, social, and political life, asserting that women must "continue education to attain and sustain."[101] The *Argus-Leader* included a national article that a new commission to study the education of women was set up by the American Council on Education to "explore the current and long-range needs of women as a result of the impact of changing social conditions upon them."[102]

In 1954, the *Bismarck Tribune* included a local article on the AAUW and the funds acquired for grants and fellowships for American and foreign women for graduate study and research. According to the article, the million-dollar fund took twenty-six years to raise and "is recognized as one of [the] largest systems of grants and fellowships available to American and foreign women." Further, this fund provided "a sure way to encourage the appointment of women to responsible positions because it helps women of ability to become so well-prepared that their qualifications cannot be overlooked."[103]

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[100] "AAUW to Have Discussion on Women's Education," *Argus-Leader*, January 18, 1950.

[101] "AAUW Hears Report of Convention," *Rapid City Journal*, October 03, 1955.

[102] "Woman Education Will Be Studied," *Argus-Leader*, January 08, 1953; "Group to Explore Women's Education," *Lincoln Star Journal*, January 08, 1953.

[103] "AAUW Funds Education of Able Women," *Bismarck Tribune*, March 13, 1954.

In Nebraska, Mrs. Leonard Campbell, vice-president of the Nebraska AAUW division, argued in 1950 that "The great end of education is to discipline, rather than furnish the mind; to train it to use its own powers, rather than fill it with the accumulations of others... We are a power and let us become America's awfully useful women."[104] In 1950, Nebraska's AAUW membership was over 1,500. According to the article, this was a gain of 7.8 percent with 12 percent of membership being composed of women university graduates of the past five years.[105] In late 1958, a national article included in the *Lincoln Journal Star* asserted that "educators as well as employers must change attitudes to adapt to a changed situation if the nation's vital womanpower is to be used efficiently in the labor force." This message was stated by the National Manpower Council and urged educators to change their views on women and argued that the solution to the education problem "lies in more adult education facilities, more graduate work, more follow-up studies, more extension education."[106]

Despite the continuous talk of bringing women into higher education to help them be educated on political matters, financials, and to be involved in society, the AAUW and local newspaper articles also offered conflicting views. During an honoring of four graduating senior girls in South Dakota in 1958, one AAUW member, Mrs. Arnold,

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[104] "'Discipline Aim of Education,' Mrs. Campbell Tells AAUW," *Fremont Tribune*, May 19, 1950.

[105] Ibid.

[106] "Educators Fail to Prepare Women For Changing Work-Life Patterns," *Lincoln Journal Star*, October 08, 1958.

stressed the need for higher education while stating that receiving a "college education was as important to the girl planning a career of homemaking as it is for the girl planning a professional career."[107] Likewise, a national article included in the *Argus-Leader* in 1959 asserted that women needed to be educated to be able to close the "intellectual gap" between her and her husband which can lead to frustrations, dissatisfaction, and divorce.[108] Further, both the National Manpower Council and the Commission on the Education of Women promoted conflicting views on women and their inclusion in the workforce and in furthering their education, as they still emphasized the ideology of domesticity and separated themselves from explicit feminism.[109]

Despite national assertions that married women could only find fulfillment inside the home, were "confused and emotionally upset," and could not "function concurrently in the component roles of mother – housewife, career woman, glamour girl, culture bearer, and status symbols of their husbands and fathers," [110] evidence suggests that married women were consistently defying the odds of national expectations across the U.S. In North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, women entered the workforce in considerable numbers throughout the 1950s, supplementing the family income and

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[107] "Students With Mrs. Arnold Talk at Sturgis Tea," *Rapid City Journal*, February 20, 1958.

[108] "See Early Marriage Problems," *Argus-Leader*, August 27, 1959.

[109] Sarah M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Temple University Press, 1994), 89.

[110] "Women Confused in Complex Life, Says Educator," *Alliance Daily Times-Herald* (Alliance, Nebraska), April 12, 1955.

combating declining farm prices. An increasing number of women in these states also entered the political arena, rising to prominent positions in government and arguing for women's equality in society and the workforce. Many married women also fought for more educational opportunities for women, hoping to emphasize that women could move into more intellectual careers and challenge national attitudes on the inferiority of women.

CHAPTER II

"A NEAT APPEARANCE AND A PLEASING PERSONALITY": SINGLE WOMEN ON THE PLAINS, 1950-1959

In the 1950s, around twenty percent of women in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska were single. In the U.S., twenty-eight percent of women aged 20-24 were single. Throughout the U.S., advertisements and articles aimed at single women attempted to uphold the national ideology of the ideal woman. Advertisements and articles within national magazines highlighted the importance of finding a husband and creating a family unit. In the Great Plains area, this ideal remained pertinent, as family units were needed to run farms and maintain a consumer culture. Advertisements and articles within local newspapers preached to single women that without a husband and family they would be unhappy and that they needed to make themselves "marriageable." At the same time, single women in the Plains navigated beyond perceptions of society and found meaningful work outside of rural farms and the family sphere. Still, while maintaining independence, single women in the 1950s continuously sought to keep up with the ideal womanly image.

From an early age, young ladies during the 1950s found themselves bombarded with articles and images detailing how to find a suitable woman's career and how to obtain a husband. Magazines, such as *Seventeen*, that were aimed at teenage girls, provide incredible insight to the national identity and role that young women should play. Since dating was a key part of adolescence, many articles instructed teenage girls on how to properly act and the "dos and don'ts" of dating. Interestingly, throughout the second

half of the 1950s, *Seventeen* included a reoccurring advice column for young women entitled “From a Boy’s Point of View.” According to Ilana Nash and Beth Bailey, these columns, penned by a young man named Jimmy Wescott, employed a masculine voice “to make girls identify with men, to pity them….to make themselves more user-friendly to boys.”[1] This male voice reinforced traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity, presenting men as dominant, powerful, and aggressive providers while viewing “[f]eminine women [as] dependent, submissive, nurturing and belong[ing] in the home.”[2] Further, *Seventeen* included articles that showcased young women eager to begin their domestic lives and start families. Articles like these highlighted what young women should ultimately be vying for.

In 1957, *Seventeen* published a book entitled *The Seventeen Book of Young Living*. The book, much like the magazine, instructed teenage girls on things like looking well, how to get a date, and the importance of marriage. On the issue of flirting and finding a man, the book asserted that “Overaggression is certainly unfeminine….in a man-woman relationship, I doubt whether any woman can boss a real man” and detailed ways that a young lady could give chase without compromising here femininity.[3] After a

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[1] Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-century Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2006), 14.

[2] Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 98.

[3] Enid A Haupt, *The Seventeen Book of Young Living* (New York: David McKay Company Inc., 1957), 60-61.

man was found, marriage was the obvious answer. According to the book, “Marriage is the greatest career a woman can have,”[4] and a woman’s duty was to satisfy her husband’s needs. Further, it was important to remember “that if a man’s home is his castle, he must be the lord and master; and you, therefore, are the chatelaine, the mistress of the castle and keeper of the keys to a very happy existence as a wedded wife.”[5] The magazine left no doubt that a young female had a role to play as a subordinate to her husband.

In the Midwest, much like they did with married women, local articles often offered conflicting views on single women. In 1951, South Dakota’s *Argus-Leader* included a national story entitled, “Good News for Girls! There Are Still Plenty of Men of Marriage Age.” This article asserted that there was “good news for women interested in life, liberty and the pursuit of a husband,” as the 1950 census showed that there was a surplus of unmarried men, with 2,800,000 more single males 14 years old or older than single women.[6] Two years later, articles in the Dakotas and Nebraska feature an account of a sociologist’s findings on single and married women. According to the article, single women were considered to be “more attractive” than the married women; single women were more educated, yet came from poorer backgrounds indicating that “girls from poor families who wish to climb socially by scholastic efforts have more trouble in the marriage market;” and single women were characterized as being “‘too timid’ and ‘too

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[4] Ibid., 198.

[5] Ibid., 201.

[6] “Good News For Girls! There Are Still Plenty of Men of Marriage Age, *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls, SD), June 17, 1951.

independent.'"[7] Interestingly, though this article appeared in newspapers in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, the names of the articles were strikingly different. Where South Dakota's article highlighted the "Independence" of single women, North Dakota pondered whether married or single women looked best. Nebraska emphasized that married women aged "more gracefully than single gals."[8]

Nationally, a story contained in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1952, entitled "It's Tougher Than Ever To Get a Husband," reported that, according to the 1950 Census, women outnumbered men by a ratio of 100 women to every 98.1 males. This disparity, likely caused by the loss of men in WWII, raised questions about women's marriageability. The article concluded that a physically attractive woman should still have no trouble finding a mate, but the "'marginal girl' – the one who is not so attractive or who is limited in her opportunities for contact with men," would have a much harder time.[9] These "marginal girls" must "throw her weight around in the open marriage market," the article asserted, by finding enticing assets like a "good steady job."[10] At the same time, the article highlighted that women were highly anxious to find a mate with

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[7] "Single Gals Are 'Independent' Says Sociologist," *Rapid City Journal* (Rapid City, SD), June 11, 1953; "Married Women Age More Gracefully Than Single Gals," *Beatrice Daily Sun* (Beatrice, Nebraska), June 14, 1953; "Married? Single? Who Looks Best?," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), June 12, 1953.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Rufus Jarman, "It's Tougher Than Ever to Get a Husband," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 23, 1952, 152.

[10] Ibid.

"practically every woman" thinking about marriage "more than any other subject." Even "career girl[s]," who attended postgraduate work for careers, would "drop their studies and get married in a minute, if the right man came along."[11] Young single women undoubtedly felt they had to model the advertisements found in women's magazines to "get a man," wanting to look good and "fulfill their role as a mother and homemaker."[12] This message, according to the article, led to the typical American girl being unsure of what her clear role was outside of marriage.

Almost a year prior, both the *Argus-Leader* and the *Rapid City Journal* in South Dakota featured an article detailing the statistics of women outnumbering men, pondering how women were going to combat this situation and fight for their spot next to a man. Not wanting to become a "spinster," women would have to play a game of "Musical Chairs" in the name of courtship and matrimony as it was now "every woman for herself, no holds barred, tooth-and-claw, the law of the jungle" with woman vying for not only single men, but hunting married men as well.[13] Wives, therefore, had to be vigilant about keeping their husbands. The message was clear, women needed to do almost anything to be married, even if it meant ruining someone else's marriage.

The Dakotas, however, faced an opposite dilemma in the early 1950s. Rather than women outnumbering men, 21,835 more men were single in the state compared to

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 154.

[13] "Every Girl For Herself These Days," *Rapid City Journal*, March 18, 1951 and *Argus-Leader* March 11, 1951.

women. Further, North Dakota had 79,986 men aged 14 years or older and 11,049 who were divorced or widowed, totaling 91,935 single men.[14] Conversely, numbers of single women totaled 69,200. According to the 1952 article, "N.D. Lacks Enough Girls To Go Around," the problem stemmed from the tendency of unmarried women to gravitate towards cities rather than stay in rural areas like unmarried men seemed to do.[15] This urbanization of single women is highlighted in the city of Bismarck. According to the 1952 article, "Bismarck Poor Spot For Bashful Maidens," single ladies outnumbered men by about a thousand. Pulling data from the 1950 Census, the article asserted that in the age group of 14 years or older, there was "almost one thousand more unmarried females than unmarried males," with 2,876 unmarried women and 1,888 unmarried men.[16]

By 1954, the national surplus of unmarried women to men remained unchanged. By this time, however, newspapers in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska all included an article telling single ladies to "relax" as "their chances of getting a husband" was "constantly getting better." According to the articles, recent figures highlighted that instead of women outnumbering men, for every 100 girls, there was an extra 2.3 boys.[17] Among these three Plains states, North Dakota boasted that they were the hot spot for

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[14] "N.D. Lacks Enough Girls To Go Around," *Bismarck Tribune*, April 30, 1952; "South Dakota Unmarried Men in Majority," *Rapid City Journal*, June 04, 1952.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Bismarck Poor Spot For Bashful Maidens," *Bismarck Tribune*, April 01, 1952.

[17] "Relax Girls, Chances Better," *Bismarck Tribune*, October 18, 1954; "Relax, Girls," *Lead Daily Call* (South Dakota), October 20, 1954; "Relax, Girls," *Columbus Telegram* (Columbus, Nebraska), October 18, 1954.

bachelors. In November 1954, an article entitled "Bachelors Galore" asserted that the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* stated that "the best place for smart girls" to look for a husband should "do their hunting" in North Dakota since it had the greatest proportion of bachelors at 34.7 percent.[18] Interestingly, the influx of bachelors in North Dakota almost became a slogan three years prior. In a "Zest O' Might" contest aimed at finding a slogan for North Dakota license plate tags, State Representative Ernest Livingston utilized statistics on the amount of unmarried men compared to unmarried women and asserted that the tags should highlight the state as "The Bachelor State."[19]

These statistics and promotion of the ratio of unmarried men to women in both national and local articles in the early 1950s highlight sentiments that single women should make finding a husband a priority. She would find no problem in securing a mate and thus falling into the national ideology of becoming married and domesticated. Further, by finding a suitable man to marry, women could avoid becoming "spinsters." To be labeled a spinster in the 1950s meant a woman failed to uphold the national ideals and would forever remain unhappy and alone. Numerous national headlines scorned spinsters and offered advice to aid women from becoming an "old maid." National and local headlines in the Dakotas and Nebraska during the 1950s often offered the same advice. In 1951, the North Dakota *Bismarck Tribune* and the Nebraska *Fremont Tribune* both included a national article that urged women to "get happy…unless you want to

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[18] "Bachelors Galore," *Bismarck Tribune*, November 09, 1954.

[19] "'Zest O' Might' Contest Seen," *Bismarck Tribune*, February 13, 1951.

wind up an old maid." This article detailed that Dr. Moore, a college psychologist from Arkansas, conducted a study comparing 176 wives and 176 spinsters to a list of 104 traits. The study found that "the old maids are not a happy group" and they had an "unhappy disposition," feared "sex and childbirth," and were "self-centered fault-finder[s]" who always wanted to have their own way.[20] The article also asserted that the spinsters' trouble was that they were "educated too much for careers instead of for marriage" and as a result, found it "hard to treat men naturally."[21]

Three years later, the fear of becoming a spinster remained prevalent. In 1954, the *Argus-Leader* included a question asked by a young woman to advice columnist Dorothy Dix, fearing that the older single women that she worked with would influence her behavior to the point that she too would become a "cynical spinster." According to the woman writer in her twenties, the older single women co-workers were "cynical, selfish, insist on having things their way, and their minds are closed to any suggestions of modernized methods…They are so accustomed to living alone that they are forgetting there are other people in the world." The young writer found herself becoming irritable over little details, mirroring that of the women she spoke of, and she wondered, "I don't want to be like these older women; how can I avoid it?" To suppress her worries, Dorothy Dix offered that it would be smart to find new friends, mingle, perhaps find a

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[20] "Home Cooking Not Enough: Get Happy, Gals, Or You Won't Get A Guy," *Bismarck Tribune*, May 07, 1951; "Beauty and Brains Not Enough! You Gotta Smile to Snare Man," *Fremont Tribune*, May 07, 1951.

[21] Ibid.

new career, and find substitutions with active thinking to curb "the meaningless round of trivia" that occupied the young woman's mind. Further, Dix asserted that the young woman was "much too young and intelligent to become prey to pettiness."[22] In this regard, the answer to avoiding becoming an old maid was clear, it was on the young woman to ensure that she occupied herself enough or found the appropriate friends or else she would become a spinster herself. Found in a nationally syndicated advice column, this article spoke volumes about the apparent threat to remaining a single woman in the 1950s.

At the same time, however, local advertisements within the same newspapers for single women. In the *Argus-Leader* in 1953, listed eleven jobs called to single women to work as babysitters, elderly care assistants, secretary assistants, and plant workers. Most asserted that they preferred a "young, single girl" to fill these positions.[23] Likewise, in the same year, Nebraska's *Lincoln Star* included numerous calls for single women and girls to work as waitresses, laundresses, nurses, and cosmetic counselors who were "attractive" and "well groomed."[24] The *Bismarck Tribune* also included classified ads aimed at girls and single women throughout the 1950s. Like South Dakota and Nebraska, North Dakota newspapers included ads looking for waitresses, babysitters, and young

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[22] "Cynical Spinsters: Young Woman Fears Associate May Influence Her Demeanor," *Argus-Leader*, April 13, 1954.

[23] Help Wanted Ads, *Argus-Leader*, January 11, 1953, 30.

[24] Help Wanted Ads, *Lincoln Star*, June 28, 1953, 15.

clerks. Many also explicitly called for "quiet working girls" to rent apartments and highlighted that children were not welcome.[25]

Local articles in the latter half of the 1950s signify a shift in some views on single women. Ruth Millet's national columns appeared in newspapers across the Dakotas and Nebraska. In late 1955, an article appeared that blamed married women for the inability of single women to find a mate. Within the article Millet asks, "Are married women today falling down on their traditional role of matchmaking for all the eligible bachelors and unmarried women of their acquaintance?" In her opinion, social agencies and churches were not responsible for aiding in the matchmaking process, rather it was "a job for married women."[26] In this, single women were not failing at finding a man, rather it was the married women who failed to help them find a mate.

Earlier in 1955, Ruth Millett also asserted that women needed to stop referring to other women in negative ways especially when they referred to "unmarried women as 'old maids.'"[27] This observation resurfaced again in 1957 when Millett asserted that single women resented being referred to as "Old Maids." She referenced a single woman's writing to illustrate these frustrations. The single woman, in her 30s, wrote, "I am in my 30s, fairly attractive and have lots of friends, and I am not married. The latter

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[25] Want Ads, *Bismarck Tribune*, May 20, 1953, 18.

[26] Ruth Millett, *Rapid City Journal*, November 13, 1955; *Fremont Tribune*, November 17, 1955; *Beatrice Daily Sun*, December 08, 1955.

[27] Ruth Millett, *Beatrice Daily Sun*, January 07, 1955; *Lead Daily Call,* January 08, 1955; *Rapid City Journal*, January 14, 1955.

does not bother me in the least because I just haven't met 'the man.' I still have hopes, but until I fall honestly and truly in love, I prefer to stay single. I am not sorry for myself, but my friends seem to be." The woman went on to say that though she still has hopes to marry and have children one day, she had not yet met a man worth doing that for and would not marry "just to have a Mrs. tacked onto the front of my name….I am happy. I lead a busy life….why do I have to pretend not to mind when I am referred to as an 'old maid'? And why am I made to feel apart by the superior and pitying attitude of friends my own age, just because they happen to be married?"[28] These questions likely resonated with Millet's readers and helped solidify that many women wished to marry for love, rather than simply pushing away from the "old maid" label.

Being called an "old maid" was not the only thing that single women were tired of hearing by the late 1950s. In March 1959, the *Bismarck Tribune* included an article by Hal Boyle that compiled many other comments that single girls were tired of hearing. The article featured over twenty statements or questions that single women decried, including, "How come a pretty girl like you never got married?"; "I just love your premature gray hair. It is premature, isn't it?"; "I'd like to give you a raise, Cecily, but I've got to take care of the married men first."; "It says here in the paper there are 1,564,328 more women than men in America. Isn't that funny?"[29] Single women, apparently, were fine with being single and sick of being berated for their lack of marriage.

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[28] Ruth Millett, *Rapid City Journal*, February 06, 1957.
[29] Hal Boyle, "Single Girls Tire of Hearing These," *Bismarck Tribune*, March 19, 1959.

Single women, in fact, found many options for paid employment. Interestingly, by 1955, the employment of women averaged 20 million, a million above the peak years of 1943-45 during WWII. Women, moreover, held jobs in every one of the 446 occupations listed by the Labor Department. Many jobs in the fields of medicine, chemistry, law, theology, engineering, and accounting, furthermore, went to single women, particularly those of 35 years or older. According to a national news article within a local South Dakota newspaper, "Of the employed single gals over 35, professional jobs were held by 24 per cent as against 10 per cent of married working women in this age group."[30] The "Help Wanted" ads across the Dakotas and Nebraska during the late 1950s highlight the call for professional jobs directed toward single women.

Often located among the various domestic and waitressing jobs in local job advertisements, professional jobs called for single women. In 1956, Nebraska ads showcased jobs for laboratory and x-ray technicians, part-time accountants, and airline training for flight and ground-work. Perhaps most interesting is the latter, which called for women from ages 17 to 35 with an education of high school or better and a "pleasing personality."[31] Likewise, in 1958, the same ads existed in Nebraska, highlighting the need for junior accountants and the unlimited amount of airline careers available, again calling for high school graduates with "good health and appearance."[32] These job

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[30] "Census Reports Farm Wives As Ladies Bring Home Bacon," *Rapid City Journal*, October 21, 1956.
[31] "Want Ads," *Lincoln Star Journal*, November 04, 1956, 20.

[32] "Want Ads," *Lincoln Star Journal*, August 03, 1958, 98.

listings, calling for single women with good looks and a good personality reiterate national expectations of the 1950s. Besides finding a suitable man to marry, women were continuously expected to uphold specific ideals of being pleasant in character and aesthetically pleasing.

In the Dakotas, "Help Wanted" ads in the late 1950s called for women to work in government jobs, and as stenographers, insurance agents, and college workers. Particularly interesting were the calls for college graduate accountant and government jobs. Throughout the late '50s, advertisements called to single women to "prepare now for U.S. Civil Service job openings" as they "provide much greater security than private employment and excellent opportunity for advancement."[33] Specifically geared toward single women, these jobs allowed a way for women to broaden their horizons and offered a space away from domesticity and child rearing.

Still throughout the 1950s, single women remained in local and national headlines for reasons related to their marital status. Articles highlighted why women should be married and the negative effects of being immoral. Since social and sexual morality was inexplicably linked to worries of communism and the security of the nation, nothing appeared more shocking than findings promoted by the Kinsey Report in 1953. Interviewing 5,940 American women, Kinsey found that about 40 percent of females "petted" before the age of fifteen; between 69 and 95 percent had done so by eighteen years old; and about 90 percent of the females surveyed "had had some sort of petting

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[33] "Want Ads," *Argus-Leader*, September 28, 1959, 22.

experience prior to marriage."[34] Further, the report found that nearly 50 percent of females engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage.[35]

Headlines throughout the Dakotas and Nebraska showcased the shock of such findings. In the *Lincoln Journal Star*, women and men wrote letters to the newspaper voicing their distaste for the paper running a story on the findings. One woman, Mrs. O. Sundel, wrote that she never thought "The Journal would ever stoop so low as to publish the Kinsey Report," as it did not give juveniles "much incentive to lead decent lives." Another writer, this time a man named Ben Gadd, matched Sundel's sentiments and asserted, "I am afraid that the moral fiber of The Journal has sunk to a new low," as it had forced the information "into our homes uninvited for our teen-age children to read." Perhaps most interesting, however, was the inclusion of a Pastor Vance Rodgers' response to the article, commenting that he appreciated the article as "the press does not always give expression to this point of view in presenting the sensational side of female sex life."[36] To have a pastor remark on such findings, especially favorably, was shocking. Many were angered with the pastor's response, so much so that the *Lincoln Journal Star* ran a response on September 03, 1953, clarifying that Mr. Rodgers "had not expressed himself at all on the Kinsey Report, other than to approve of The Journal's

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[34] Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, Clyde Martin, and Paul Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Institute for Sex Research, Indian University, 1965), 233.

[35] Ibid, 286.

[36] "Public Mind: Kinsey Report," *Lincoln Journal Star*, August 22, 1953.

editorial comment and to urge widespread attention to that comment."[37] Despite reader's assumptions that Pastor Rodgers seemed okay with these findings, his comments were geared toward praising the newspaper's inclusion of the female experience and an alternate side to human sexuality.

The outrage over publishing about the Kinsey Report appeared in South Dakota newspapers as well. One Sioux Falls woman, Mrs. Orville Reichelt, felt particularly angry over the presence of the Kinsey Report in the *Argus-Leader*. In a lengthy response, Reichelt asked, "Why didn't you report there was a shortage of soap in Sioux Falls? Someone would have loaned you some! To put out such a disgustingly dirty sheet as the Dr. Kinsey report; have you no innate sense of decency?" She continued, "How could you publish such an intimate, degrading untrue account of womanhood? What thoughts do you think filled the minds of the young teenage boys concerning perhaps their own mothers, sisters and girl friends after reading of such debauchery?" According to Mrs. Reichelt, the inclusion of the findings would lead young men and the nation to believe that women were indecent and disrespectful to their bodies. Rather, she asserted that based on her eight years of being a nurse and hearing many people reveal intimate secrets, "most people lead good clean lives. They do not break the moral law as Dr. Kinsey would have you believe."[38]

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[37] "More or Less Personal: A Chat with the Editor," *Lincoln Journal Star*, September 03, 1953.
[38] "The Kinsey Report: To the Editor of the Argus-Leader," *Argus-Leader*, August 26, 1953.

In North Dakota, a September 1953 article in the *Bismarck Tribune* detailed that the Kinsey book was not exactly "selling like hot cakes in Bismarck," both due to its hefty price tag of eight dollars and its vast publicity in newspapers and magazines. Still, when one woman was asked about the report, she replied that "just seeing Kinsey's name in print now makes her sick."[39] Less than a month later, however, another article asserted that Bismarckers were more willing to read the book compared to buying it. By the time the book was available, "five persons were already on the waiting list."[40] An article written by local man George Sokolsky saw the report in a different manner. Rather than echo other's thoughts that Kinsey made women seem immoral, Sokolsky asserted that "It would seem to me that Dr Kinsey has set out to make sex unpopular….Up here on my farm, sex is a normal condition among robins, woodchucks, rabbits, deer and humans. The subject is so normal that it is no more discussed than the operations of the other 3,000 more or less, parts of the human body." Rather than getting worked up over talks of sex, "The most interesting gossip among my neighbors is when a girl is unfortunate before marriage." Further, Sokolsky asserted, "Heaven forbid that anyone should even think of his wife as merely a partner in sex. She is the mother of his children, which is more important."[41]

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[39] "Report on Kinsey," *Bismarck Tribune*, September 18, 1953.

[40] "Kinsey Count," *Bismarck Tribune*, October 10, 1953.

[41] George Sokolsky, "Kinsey Report Deforms Normal Thing," *Bismarck Tribune*, August 20, 1953.

George Sokolsky's statement that the most interesting gossip around his town was when an unmarried girl become "unfortunate" before marriage speaks to another controversial concern for single women during the 1950s. During the era, studies, like the 1958 study conducted by the Institute for Sex Research entitled "Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion," highlighted climbing numbers in single women becoming pregnant before marriage and increasing abortion rates. The year 1957 provided the "record year for teen pregnancy in the United States."[42] Between 1940 and 1957, the number of unlawful births increased by 125 percent.[43] These numbers, and conflicted feelings about such numbers, can be seen within local newspapers.

On February 24, 1958, papers across the Dakotas and Nebraska included a story on the Kinsey Report for premarriage pregnancies. According to the article, the findings were that one in ten American women became pregnant before marriage with 89 percent ending in abortion. Building off the initial study on sexual behavior and American women, the article highlighted the study's conclusion that "Pregnancy before marriage is not just a rare problem, not just a mischance which affects an occasional ignorant farm girl – but a widespread social problem."[44] The rise in abortions intensified mainly

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[42] Gloria Feldt, *The War on Choice: The Right-wing Attack on Women's Rights and How to Fight Back* (Bantam Books, 2004), 30.

[43] Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe V. Wade* (Psychology Press, 1992), 13.

[44] "Kinsey Report on Premarriage Pregnancies Out," *Argus-Leader* February 24, 1958; "Kinsey Report Notes Pregnancy Rate for Unmarried U.S. Women," *Rapid City Journal*, February 24, 1958; "Kinsey Reports on the Human Female," *Beatrice Daily Sun*, February 24, 1958; "New Kinsey Report's on Pregnancy," *Bismarck Tribune*, February 24, 1958.

because of the structural changes in women's lives. According to Leslie Reagan in her book, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, with expanding opportunities and responsibilities for women and the growing number of women entering college and the workplace, the need for abortions grew as this increased movement into such areas "required that women postpone and control childbearing."[45] For single women, this was amplified as they were expected to remain childless. Likewise, to become pregnant in high school or college meant an abrupt end to her education or stigmatization if she carried the child to term.

Local and national articles in the Dakotas and Nebraska pondered the Report's results, often citing psychological repercussions and dilemmas over abortion. In 1958, the *Beatrice Daily Sun* included a four-part series that highlighted the multi-sided portrait of the "American Eve." The third part in the series, in the June 27, 1958 edition, specifically included the Kinsey Report and highlighted that "one out of 10 unmarried women have been pregnant," with many of these women solving "their immediate problem with a hasty venture into wedlock." One out of seven, however, "reportedly resorted to a premarital abortion." According to the article, this happened because women had lost their "protective position" in a patriarchal society, and became more sexually exploited by men who had become "more wary about getting married." The article asserted that "On the one hand society teases her [the unmarried mother] and on

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[45] Leslie Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (University of California Press, 1997), 195.

the other it condemns." It concluded that "despite the freedom women allegedly have, society still makes few allowances for those who deviate from acceptable behavior."[46]

This article underscored the double-standard on abortions. On one hand, women were finding significant freedom with being able to decide for their own education and life goals, on the other hand they felt guilt for deviating from acceptable societal behaviors. Despite the illegal nature of abortion during the 1950s, findings suggested that many single women were increasingly taking matters into their own hands, and discussing such measures, when it came to unwanted pregnancies regardless of societal norms and consequences. However, national articles included within local newspapers across the Plains still attempted to solidify the view that abortions were illegal and deplorable, while also highlighting that they were continuing to take place at higher levels. These articles often carried accounts of large underground abortion rings which reportedly performed hundreds and thousands of abortions every year. At the same time, national magazines also questioned existing abortion laws.

During 1958 and 1959, articles across the Dakotas and Nebraska highlighted abortion rings being broken up and uncovered in larger cities. In late 1959, the *Argus-Leader* included an article on the uncovering of a $6,000 a week "abortion mill" that was reportedly catering to "college girls and entertainers" and handled an average of "10 abortions a week at $600 each."[47] Other articles highlighted individual cases of young,

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[46] "The American Woman – 1958: Modern Eve Discovers Sex—and Neuroses," *Beatrice Daily Sun*, June 27, 1958.

[47] "Abortion Mill Uncovered in N.Y.," *Argus-Leader*, December 05, 1959.

unmarried women and abortion claims with parents being questioned and even charged for their teenage daughters being the "victim of an abortion."[48] Further, individual doctors faced manslaughter charges and other felonies for performing abortions.[49]

At the same time, local newspapers included international attitudes and laws on abortions. In 1958, the *Bismarck Tribune* included two international articles on abortions: one highlighting Czechoslovakia's easing of abortions and one showcasing the increasing number of abortions occurring in Hungary. The first article detailed Czechoslovakia new legalized abortion law stating that abortions could be authorized within the first three months of pregnancy "if the family feels it has too many children," "if the expectant mother has been widowed or her husband is an invalid," "if the mother is unmarried or for other reasons faces difficulties should the child be born," or "if the child will be born into a broken family." The article also explained that the law was changed because "laws against abortion did not keep women from having them," and because old laws failed to recognize that today "woman enjoys complete equality with the man and so cannot be a mere passive object."[50] The second article, focusing on rising

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[48] "Parents Charged in Abortion Case," *Lincoln Star*, April 26, 1958; see also "Father of Girl, Woman Quizzed in Abortion Case," *Lincoln Star*, April 25, 1958 and "Abortion Inquiry On," *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 24, 1958.

[49] There are numerous articles containing examples of doctors being charged with abortion crimes across the Dakotas and Nebraska. For an example see "Abortion Charge Files," *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 20, 1958 and "K.C. Osteopath is Convicted in Abortion Death," *Lincoln Star*, October 15, 1959. These two articles detail charges filed on Dr. Harry Werbin and his conviction over a year later.

[50] "Red Czechs Ease Laws on Abortion, *Bismarck Tribune*, February 27, 1958. This article can also be found in a South Dakota article entitled "Czech Regime Eases Laws on Abortions," *Rapid City Journal*, February 26, 1958.

abortion rates in Hungary, detailed that abortions in the country had increased by 50 percent in the year with authorities "urging women to use contraceptives instead." This jump originated from the change in legality of abortions in Hungary where Hungarian law asserted that "any woman can have an abortion, though the free medical service may make her pay if it is not considered justified."[51]

Publishing these two articles within Plains newspapers, however, carried a double meaning. Both Czechoslovakia and Hungary were communist countries in the 1950s and both articles utilized rhetoric to separate the American national identity from laws put forth by these communist countries. While both articles seem to promote a woman's right to obtain a legal abortion without social or moral implication, the emphasis on the fact that they were communist countries deterred women from making the same decisions in the U.S. Supporting legal abortions may have been falling into line with communist regimes, becoming a national threat and a danger to society.

An international article featured in the *Argus-Leader* in October 1959 that emphasized high abortion rates in Japan provides another view on legalized abortion in the 1950s. Despite the threat of Japan in the 1940s to the U.S. during WWII, by the 1950s, Japan had become a reliable ally to the U.S., a relationship that grew considerably due to favorable international conditions and trade brought on by the Cold War. Differing from the condescending nature of the North Dakota articles on Czechoslovakia and Hungary, this article on Japan promoted a more positive view. The article began

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[51] "Legal Abortions Up 50% in Hungary," *Bismarck Tribune*, June 03, 1958.

with a positive assertion, stating, "Cramped for living space, the Japanese are winning a struggle to control their explosively growing population. Birth control and legalized abortions are turning the tide." Because of Japan's ever-increasing population, the article praised the country's "check" on a problem that had affected the economy and standard of living. The article detailed that abortions were first permitted in Japan in 1952 "to safeguard a woman's life, to prevent transmission of serious hereditary diseases" and for "health and economic reasons." However, most importantly, the article explained that instructions for women to take birth control is still the most recommended and that "only married women can obtain the legal operations" for abortion.[52] Though the article seemed to praise Japan's laws, it also posed as a stark moral and societal reminder that unmarried women should not be having sexual relations, nor becoming pregnant.

Popular culture of the time also tackled the issue of abortion, much to the moral dismay of many Americans. A national article included in the *Argus-Leader* in 1959 included a talk on morality in movies, highlighting specific movies that emphasized abortion or sex and detailing big changes in themes within movies after 1956. Such movies as "Blue Denim," where a teenager has an abortion arranged, are discussed even when film censorship codes stated, "The subject of abortion shall be discouraged, shall never be more than suggested, and when referred to shall be condemned." The article asserted that movie makers were at a crossroads as they toiled with the fact of invoking

[52] "Japan Slows Births; Abortion Rate High," *Argus-Leader*, October 11, 1959.

the “wrath of the moralists or the apathy of the public” but have became “outspoken about things that were once never discussed in the nicer parlors.”[53]

From 1950 to 1960, the birth ratio of unmarried women in the U.S. rose from 42.6 to 56.9. In North Dakota, the rate rose from 20.5 to 25.3; in South Dakota this rate rose from 19.4 to 31.3. In Nebraska, no such rates were included in the report until the 1970s, however, it rose from 75.2 to 114.7 between 1970 and 1980, suggesting that a similar rise may have occurred during the years of 1950 to 1960.[54] This birth ratio for single women, and the view of such, can also be found within local newspapers. In 1959, the *Rapid City Journal* included an article documenting the rise of illegitimate births in the U.S. and in South Dakota. The article detailed that in 1956, the amount of babies born out of wedlock was 193,000 in the U.S. and stated that “The figure is shocking for the nation, but becomes more shocking when you know – or should know – that Rapid City, the Black Hills, the West River and all of South Dakota are contributing to the statistics, the population and the problem.” The article detailed some problems that occur because of the high numbers, including public funds that “seem to put society into the position of subsidizing immoral conduct,” and welfare service that had “opened the way to close study of the personal problems of unmarried mothers.” Overall, the article conncluded that the change in society’s attitude toward unmarried mothers has led to “More adoption

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[53] “To Entice Public: Movie Makers Risk Wrath of Moralists,” *Argus-Leader*, September 28, 1959.

[54] The ratio equals the proportion of births to single women per 1,000 births according to the National Center for Health Statistics data in 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

services and development of an extensive demand for babies to adopt" which "have helped to win acceptance to the new way of looking at these questions."[55]

Another *Argus-Leader* article in 1959 highlighted the "controversy over ebbing standards of American morality and the resulting burden on U.S. taxpayers." Spanning almost a full page, the article broke down the national statistics of unmarried mothers and highlighted the selling of babies on the "black market," younger girls becoming pregnant, women playing a "more aggressive sex role," measures taken across the nation to offer public welfare assistance and to stop these births, and sexual education classes offered to younger girls. These issues prompted considerable debates, with some saying that relief payments to unmarried mothers should be cut, stating that "'We are literally paying a bonus for illegitimacy,'" and others arguing "'Punishment is not the answer…No amount of censure or hardship will abolish the problem.'"[56]

Despite the apparent distain for federal and state supported programs for single mothers, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska newspapers all held local articles on homes for unmarried mothers and articles that encouraged adoptions. In 1958, the *Bismarck Tribune* included an article detailing where money was being spent from the Bismarck Community Chest that aided in services throughout the entire state. Among one of three agencies that received funding from the Community Chest was the Florence Crittenton Home. The Home received $1,000 and was cited as providing services to

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[55] "People Do Have Babies," *Rapid City Journal*, April 24, 1959.

[56] "Storm of Controversy Develops as Illegitimacy Hits New High," *Argus-Leader*, August 09, 1959.

unmarried mothers and their babies. The article asserted that during 1957, “the Home served 147 girls, an increase of 26 over 1956” with eighty-seven babies being born during the year. Of those eighty-seven babies, 57 were being released for adoption. The article asserted that the “largest number of girls were in the 13 to 20 year old age group” and “perhaps the most difficult problem the home has is making a suitable plan for the 14 or 15 year old girl who cannot return to her own home.” Since many families did not want to tackle the burden of raising their daughter’s child and did not want to face negative views from society, coupled with lack of funds, the Home faced the dilemma of housing and finding appropriate placement for young mothers. The article also provided statistics for the state on unmarried mothers reporting that the North Dakota Department of Health found that “about two per cent of the babies born in the state each year are born outside-of-wedlock. In 1956 this number was 302, 76 of these young mothers became Florence Crittenton girls.” Further, the Home was having trouble keeping pace with the amount of services offered to girls, taking considerable losses with money the year prior. They were able to recoup some of the losses due to the Community Chest donation.[57]

In 1959, the *Argus-Leader* in South Dakota ran a similar article, this time focusing on the rebuilding of a home for unmarried mothers. According to the article, the Lutheran Welfare Society of South Dakota proposed a state-wide campaign that would replace the building’s frame dwellings to make such fire resistant. The home’s campaign enlisted the aid of 350 South Dakota congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,

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[57] “Where Chest Dollars Go: 3 Agencies Benefit City, State,” *Bismarck Tribune*, October 15, 1958.

American Lutheran Church, United Evangelical Church, and the Lutheran Free Church.[58] The same article ran in the *Deadwood Pioneer-Times* and detailed that the statewide home cared for "unmarried mothers, placing children in homes, aiding disturbed children, guiding displaced persons and refugees and ministering to the ages and ill in public and private institutions," and that these services were "extended to those who can be served, irrespective of color, creed, or financial status."[59]

Nebraska also had many church-sponsored programs for single mothers. In 1959, the *Fremont Tribune* included a story with financial reports of the Lutheran Children's Service Society. According to the article, during the year of 1958 the Society had serviced 241 children, 48 unmarried mothers, and that 69 children were in the process of being adopted during the year, 24 children were being served at the Fremont home, and 70 children were being served in foster homes.[60] A 1958 article in the same newspaper detailed the Society's purpose explaining that it was founded in 1892 by a group who was concerned about the lack of care for orphans and then expanded to servicing "children from broken homes, to finding of foster homes, help for unmarried mothers and family service."[61]

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[58] "Lutheran Welfare Plans Building," *Argus-Leader*, April 30, 1959.

[59] "RC Man is Head of Lutheran Drive," *Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, April 23, 1959.

[60] "Service Society Elects New Directors to Board," *Fremont Tribune*, January 28, 1959.

[61] "Children's Home Activities Told to Rotary Club," *Fremont Tribune*, November 22, 1958.

Despite the number of societies aimed at helping unmarried women, views on such women remained mixed within advice columns. Ann Landers's national advice columns appeared in newspapers across the Dakotas and Nebraska, and often sparked hot debates among readers, especially on the issue of single mothers. In the *Bismarck Tribune* in late 1959, an article entitled "Advice for Unwed Girls Starts Debate," saw a lady writing, "Are you tetched in the head or what? How can you advise a young girl to have a baby out of wedlock? Whether or not the parents are madly in love is of little importance when a baby is on the way. Your advice in this case stank." Another reader wrote in, "You ought to be tarred and feathered. The idea, advising an expectant mother not to marry! After I read that advice I got my bifocals out to make sure my eyes hadn't played tricks on me." Ann responded to the readers that, "The mail has been running 35 to 1 in favor of NOT forcing a marriage. Every one who wrote has had first-hand experience. Thank you all for letting me know how it looks from inside the lodge."[62]

Over a year prior, the Ann Landers column in the *Argus-Leader* answered a reader that had given her baby up for adoption to her Aunt and Uncle. Ann responded, "you made a mistake when you gave the baby to relatives. Unmarried mothers who have nothing to offer should put their babies up for adoption through a legitimate agency. How much better (and less painful) if you'd have made this decision before the baby came." Landers further stated, "Some unmarried mother have parents who will open their hearts and their homes and help to raise a fatherless child. Apparently yours were

[62] "Advice for Unwed Girls Starts Debate," *Bismarck Tribune*, November 27, 1959.

not able to do so. In such a case, it's best to arrange for adoption at birth, and not put yourself through the torture of bidding farewell to a child you've seen, held, and grown to love."[63]

In a 1958 article in the *Fremont Tribune*, Ann was again attacked for her advice on an unmarried mother. A reader wrote, "You have sullied the pages of a fine newspaper with your evil mind. What do you mean by referring to the birth of a child as an 'unfortunate event?'" The reader was referring to Ann's advice to a woman who was having a second baby out of wedlock where she asserted that the woman was in an "unconventional situation" and should not be feted for making the same mistake twice. The reader continued to exclaim, "I don't know where you've been all your life, but if you're going to give advice it's time you got the corn-silk out of your hair. This sort of think goes on all the time and often in the best families. So. It's not unconventional at all, it's a very common thing. And shame on you for being so narrow-minded." Interestingly, Ann retorted to the commenter, "Sorry, Bub, I don't feel a thing. In our society a child born out of wedlock is 'unconventional.' The frequency with which it occurs does not make it ginger-peachy, and this goes for the 'better' families, too – whatever that means. An unmarried girl who brings a child into the world is to be pitied. And if you don't think this is an unfortunate event, then I suggest you use the rocks in your head to stop up the holes."[64]

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[63] "Baby Should Be Adopted," *Argus-Leader*, July 25, 1958; also found in Nebraska newspaper, "Fatherless Baby Future is Problem," *Fremont Tribune*, July 25, 1958.

[64] "Unmarried Mother View Unchanged," *Fremont Tribune*, September 11, 1958.

Ann Landers' advice columns, and the opposing views of the readers, allow significant insight to the juxtaposing views across the nation and within the Dakotas and Nebraska. While Landers attempted to solidify the national views of single mothers, readers wrote in to express their disdain for her opinions consistently. Her advice columns entered local newspapers at various times during the late 1950s, however, focusing heavily on advice aimed toward unmarried women, they signaled changing views within local communities. Further, Ann Landers traveled to the local communities across these areas and spoke to teenagers to reassert the importance of marriage, curbing sexual impulses, and the importance of listening to parent's advice.[65]

Despite nearly every publication, classroom lecture, and advertisement highlighting the importance of marriage and settling down within the home, single women were able to navigate these borders and live fulfilling lives. While articles often chastised and admonished single women to avoid becoming spinsters and to find a nice man to begin a family, local advertisements often called to single women directly for specific job positions. Many single women outnumbered married women in more professional careers, often seeking extended years of education. Single women were also defying the national identity of sex norms during the 1950s, both shocking the nation and reaffirming that young, single women navigated gender and societal norms of the time. Further, single women increasingly had children out of wedlock and were able to steer around societal expectations and take control of their own bodies through aid from

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[65] For an example of her travels and talks with teenage students in local areas see "Hold Line, Girls – Ann Landers," *Lincoln Journal Star*, December 14, 1959.

women's homes and abortions. Local and national newspaper articles highlight these views and shifts and solidify that regardless of picturesque ideals of what a single woman should do and be, these women continuously disrupted and challenged standards and paved the way for the rejuvenation of feminism in the 1960s.

CHAPTER III

PUT ON A BUSINESS SUIT AND GRAB A MOP: MIXED MESSAGES OF MASCULINITY IN THE 1950s

During the 1950s, advertisements and articles portrayed men as the dominant head of the household and as the sole provider of the family. However, with more women engaging in work outside of the home, men's roles and position in society differed considerably from media interpretations of gender. This was especially true across the Plains states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Far from the picturesque suburban life and idolizations of men like Marlo Brando and James Dean, men on the Plains faced considerable diversity in roles. With an increase of labor-saving tools for the farm and more married women moving into the workplace and into various organizations, men on the Plains engaged in domestic roles and seemingly welcomed their wives' new roles. Still, at the same time, many men wished to maintain a traditional notion of masculinity and to endure as the head of the household.

In 1950, sociologist David Reisman published his landmark study and sociological analysis, *The Lonely Crowd*. Within this work, Reisman and his colleagues asserted that there was a sort of masculinity crisis occurring among men, with men engaging in activities traditionally associated with women and differences between women and men being eroded. Corporate America and suburban lifestyles contributed to this "crisis," which took away male individuality and leadership. Reisman's work fell in largely with the national sentiment of the 1950s where the threat of communism loomed, mass culture and consumerism skyrocketed, and suburban life became the center of the

nation and the family. In his analysis of the 1950s and Reisman's work, historian James Gilbert asserted that these threats to gender were representative of an era where anything that was considered as a challenge or negative to society was represented as "feminizing and debasing," while any positive changes were seen as a strengthening of the male character.[1]

Throughout his work, Gilbert demonstrated that while modes of masculinity were varied during the 1950s, these modes were united by a fear that women were asserting themselves too strongly within the home and in public spaces. To alleviate this fear, the male identity became dependent upon the subordination of women and homosexual men. However, according to Gilbert's analysis, though masculinity was a central concern, many men responded differently to the perceived crisis of manhood. Many men did not feel that the "threats" of suburbanization, consumerism, and marriage threatened their masculinity.[2]

Gilbert's study provides an important segue to discussing masculinity during the 1950s. Significant changes were occurring in society and within the home and many, including men themselves, the government, and national magazines, newspapers, and advertisements scrambled to rectify the perceived crisis by offering suggestions to men on how to remain masculine and how to get their masculinity back. At the same time, however, many found ways to assert their masculinity within the home and found

[1] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

[2] Ibid., 219.

themselves outside of the supposed crisis. Still, like married women and single women during the 1950s, national magazines and local newspapers within the Dakotas and Nebraska provided mixed messages to men on what masculinity was.

With a shift from the "self-made" man to the blue and white-collar man in the 1950s, came new magazines to help men navigate the reorganization of their lives within society. Launched in 1953, Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine not only became an instant hit in the 1950s due to its risqué nature, but also for its inclusion of various political interviews and articles. Since part of the perceived loss of masculinity was due to a movement out of the public sphere and into the private, feminized, sphere, *Playboy* offered an opportunity for men to carve out a new kind of masculine identity. The magazine's inaugural issue in 1953 not only offered men a chance to see a nude Marilyn Monroe, but featured articles, fictional writing, sports, and a "modern living" section, offering men advice on making a comfortable office space with a "Miller desk" and other modern furniture.[3]

Certainly risqué for a decade that called more domestic containment, Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*, published in the Midwest, marked an antithesis for magazines targeted toward men and ideals of masculinity during the 1950s. According to author Elizabeth Fraterrigo, the magazine "offered a model for living that demystified the male consumer, showing him how to display style and taste to assert status in the social hierarchy while sanctioning a pleasure-seeking approach to life," and it "promised that young males from

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[3] Margaret Miller, "Gentlemen, Be Seated: Desk Designs for the Modern Office," *Playboy*, December 1953, 41.

most walks of life could achieve playboy status and express themselves through consumer practices and leisure pursuits."[4] In Hefner's view, the "masculinity crisis" came from the ordinary roles that men were expected to fill as fathers, husbands, and corporate men and his magazine promised to break that uniformity by offering a new and exciting outlet for men. The "womanization" problem of the 1950s, in Hefner's view, was "tied to society's veneration of the family and its insistence on confining sex to marriage, which had the unhealthy effect of constricting men's and women's roles and pitting them against one another."[5] Instead of seeing masculine men as being hairy-chested, muscular, insensitive, and unintelligent, Hefner believed that rethinking the place of sex and ideas of gender in society would be able to combat the problem of gender upheaval and marital disharmony.

Yet, it would be difficult to contend with ideal images of masculine men throughout the 1950s, especially when early national magazine and local newspaper articles are considered. In June 1950, *Life* magazine included an article on the Hopalong Cassidy television show aimed at America's young boys. Featuring a tough, gun-slinging cowboy, Hopalong Cassidy was marketed to boys across the U.S. during the late 1940s and early 1950s. According to the article, anthropologist Margaret Mead explained that, "'With fathers away from family life so much in modern times, mothers are afraid the boys will imitate them instead of their fathers, and turn into sissies: they encourage their

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[4] Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

[5] Ibid., 36.

little boys to copy the current play ideal of masculinity. Girls imitate the boys.'"[6] Utilizing the perceived masculine crisis to justify the rise of Hopalong Cassidy, Mead spoke with an inflection that was characteristic of the early 1950s: with their fathers too busy being white collar men and working all the time, boys had to worry about losing their masculinity and becoming "sissies" and needed a strong male role model to look up to. In turn, young girls also prospered, as they imitated boys and thus became less "womanized."

Newspaper articles in the early 1950s also highlight the importance of men remaining masculine. In a nationally syndicated column entitled "Let's Explore Your Mind," by Albert Edward Wiggam, a reader asked, "if a man likes to shop for ribbons more than for monkey wrenches, what does it tell about his character?" Answering this question, Wiggam asserted, "This indicates he is probably a sissy…. If a man likes to match ribbons or shop for furbelows it indicates an interest in feminine things. If he likes to fix a leaking faucet, repair his car, it indicates greater masculinity."[7] At the same time, a "Let's Explore Your Mind" article published later in the year offered a conflicting message. Answering the question, "Is any man completely male or any woman completely female?," Wiggam asserted, "No. Both sexes carry some male and female hormones. Physically, some men are quite feminine and some women, masculine…. A masculinity-femininity scale…. found some husky, masculine men rated mentally toward

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[6] Oliver Jensen, "Hopalong Hits the Jackpot," *Life*, June 12, 1950, 66.

[7] "Let's Explore Your Mind," *Lincoln Journal Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), January 14, 1950.

the feminine end of the scale."[8] Though offering seemingly contrasting viewpoints, the message within both the "Let's Explore Your Mind" articles offer one, solid message: while men and women both have feminine and masculine traits, men must suppress the "negatives" of the feminine trait to secure manhood and maintain a masculine image.

Despite psychological claims that men also held innate feminine traits, much of the national rhetoric blamed women for a decline in masculinity that could not only threaten society, but national and international politics. Starting inside the home, mothers who were guilty of "Momism," which occurred from the smothering of their children with overaffection and overattention, had specific consequences for young boys, making them both passive and weak.[9] This idea also filtered out of the home and into the public and political realm. If a man was not in control of his home and did not assert his masculine male power, he would not be able to prevent any deterioration of morality in the nation.

Interestingly, newspaper articles during the early 1950s highlight the predicament of the nation and society as women were being seen as the rulers of the home. In 1952, Nebraska's *Fremont Tribune* ran an article entitled, "Consider the Husband's Plight if Madame Elected President," that pondered the effects on the nation and masculinity if a woman were to be elected President of the U.S. The article asked such questions as, "Would many male voters resent seeing a man play second fiddle and couldn't they

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[8] "Let's Explore Your Mind," *Lincoln Journal Star*, December 20, 1950.

[9] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 2008), 73.

easily transfer that resentment to his wife, the candidate?;" "What about the campaigns? Should the lady candidate take her husband along?.... what would they think of a husband sitting there while his wife does all the work?;" "What expression should he wear while she propounds the issues – adoration, respectful interest or good-humored tolerance?;" "Would he have to give the teas for the cabinet wives, lay the cornerstones, speak for charity at the women's club luncheons, launch all the ships?;" "How about the opening of the baseball season? Would the big lummox just sit there while his wife tries to throw out the first ball?"[10]

This article highlights two key connections between politics and masculinity in the 1950s. First, it indicates an assumption that all tasks of political office would be traditionally masculine, despite a woman taking office. Second, the article asserted that all these questions and other issues that would arise from a woman becoming president would surely lead to "cracks about his masculinity" and would immediately feminize the husband at her side.

The idea of a man standing as a counterpart to a woman in the political arena was not the only threat to masculinity. With more married women entering the workforce, men as helpers in the household also evoked a crisis, one that centered around male unhappiness. A 1954 article in South Dakota newspaper the *Argus-Leader* spoke of a reemergence of Popism in the 1950s as the catalyst for a decline in masculinity and unhappiness around men. The article asserted that the added leisure of the father in the

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[10] "Consider the Husband's Plight if Madame Elected President," *Fremont Tribune* (Fremont, Nebraska), October 21, 1952.

1950s encouraged them to be household-helpers, much like books and magazines encouraged during the depression of the 1930s. However, according to the article, men found it difficult to do "mother's work" and stay happy. According to psychologists, the reasons were threefold: "First…. he doesn't want to do it. Second, it makes him feel inept, incapable. Third, and perhaps most important, it represents a threat to his masculinity, to his picture of himself as a man."[11] Further, the article explained that though fathers should help a reasonable amount in the household, the consequences for helping too much could have a lasting impact on their health, perception, and on their love for their children. Overall, however, the article proclaimed that a father has "the right to be a man, if he wants to be, and resist the efforts of society to destroy his masculine identity."[12]

This proclamation in a nationally syndicated article matched the national expectation and thought that masculinity was declining within the U.S. and that men were becoming unhappy domestics, much like the women around them. However, in the Plains area of Lincoln, Nebraska, an article entitled, "Should Husbands Help?: Lincoln Men Not Helpless at Home," detailed that many married Nebraska men seemed eager and happy to help their wives. The article acknowledged that the "Modern fable has it that a husband generally feels that assumption of household tasks only serves to begin a downfall of his masculinity. He likes to come home to a tidied house, find slippers under

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[11] "What's Wrong With American Fathers?," *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), October 17, 1954.

[12] Ibid.

his chair, his pipe in a handy ash tray and the evening paper folded on a table beside him." Yet, the article asserted that in actuality "this is not a completely accurate picture" as "he may wish to read the paper and he may do so but after the meal is over he is apt to walk into the kitchen to help with the dishes as he is to return to his easy chair."[13]

Doubling down on this assertion, the article included testimonies from couples in Lincoln. Married women, such as Mrs. Hein, asserted that she did "not feel that she should ask for his [her husband's] help" as he volunteers it when he sees that her hands are full. Mrs. Matzke stated that "all husbands should help and that most husbands think so too." Likewise, other couples spoke of the husband's help in the kitchen making supper or fixing a "salad or meat dish," and willingly going grocery shopping for the household.[14] The article highlighted an alternative to national arguments that men were unhappy and unwilling to help their wives in the household. Instead of worried about a loss of masculinity, these Nebraska men appeared willing to lend an extra hand.

Perhaps even more intriguing, is a local Nebraska newspaper article entitled, "Can 'He' Bake a Cherry Pie: Boys Don Fancy Aprons, They Show Girls How." Apparently disproving the old age tale that boys are made of "Snaps and Snails and Puppy dog tails" and have no business baking, the article highlighted that boys in Plattsmouth High School prepared cherry pies for their home economics course, showcasing that "a boy gets enjoyment in making, as well as eating a cherry pie." The article tied masculinity to the

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[13] "Should Husbands Help? Lincoln Men Not Helpless at Home," *Lincoln Journal Star*, July 15, 1954.

[14] Ibid.

baking of pies, stating that "One particular pie that brought eye appeal and a touch of masculinity…. was the top curst of the pie made by Bill Gansemer. While biting his tongue he carved a Hot-Rod Club insignia." Further, stating that one of the bakers was also an athlete, the article concluded that this proves, "a boy can also be made of Snips and Snails and Puppy dog tails, and still be Sugar and Spice."[15] Located about twenty miles from the largest Nebraskan city of Omaha, the emphasis on these young men in Plattsmouth baking, coupled with husbands of Lincoln willing to help their wives, showcase a train of thought far removed from a "masculinity crisis" and bad connotations of men engaging in perceived women's work. Instead, men were able to assert masculinity by both choosing to help their wives in the home and through masculinizing traditionally feminine activities, such as carving a hot rod on the top of a pie.

Still, the questioning of the effects of changing roles among men and women in society and on masculinity continued into the mid-to-late 1950s. In December 1956, *Life* magazine ran a spread entitled "Changing Roles in Modern Marriage." Surveying areas across the U.S., the article detailed the changes of women becoming less feminine and men becoming less masculine due to changes within the household and society. Again, "Momism" is mentioned, which consequently deteriorated male masculinity during youth, making "fathers who are motherly" in response to the overaggresiveness of wives and mothers. Due to this, the article asserted that the man, becoming confused by the overaggressiveness of his wife and uncertain whether to be fair or submit to her, "'begins

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[15] "Can 'He' Bake a Cherry Pie: Boys Don Fancy Aprons, They Show Girls How," *Plattsmouth Journal* (Plattsmouth, Nebraska), April 12, 1956.

to trade roles and to take on more and more of the maternal role with the children, protecting and nurturing and worrying about them.'"[16]

When it came to the Midwest region, however, the article asserted that the robbing of men's masculine egos was not occurring as frequently due to the "relatively great stability of the Midwestern tradition and way of life," and although industrialization and urbanization were increasing in the area, it happened at a slower pace, leaving older values largely undisturbed. These values, according to the article, "came from the idea of the family farm where family roles are well established and sexual differences tend to be clear cut… The towns and smaller cities of the Midwest are populated largely by near descendants of such families….," and, "The aggressive-masculine female and the passive-dependent male exist in the Middle West, but nowhere near the numbers… in New York."[17]

However, this "great stability" of Midwestern life and traditional values was often overemphasized within local newspapers by including national articles that reiterated these traditional ideals. This can be seen within South Dakotan newspapers during the late 1950s. On the issue of women being the source of men's declining masculinity, a national article included in the *Argus-Leader* entitled, "Egan Believes Women Rob Men of Masculinity," detailed that American wives were demasculinizing their husbands, at least according to Hollywood actor Richard Egan. Egan asserted that he remained a

[16] "Changing Roles in Modern Marriage," *Life*, December 24, 1956, 115.

[17] Ibid., 113.

bachelor because he had a great fear of losing his independence and had "'no desire to let a woman change me into her way of living.'" He went on to state, "'Women work in devious ways. They lure their husbands into the kitchen and start them cooking and doing the dishes. They even get the poor guys to do housework. All this contributes to depriving a man of his masculinity.'"[18] Egan did not explain, however, who does domestic work for a single man who wished to remain a bachelor like himself.

Likewise, in a 1956 article included in the *Rapid City Journal*, an anonymous woman writer explained that she felt "genuinely sorry for American men," chiefly because the breadwinners of the household were "overworked, overtired, and underrated." The anonymous writer explained that the "American male helped give his family the highest standard of living in the world, but he takes them on more picnics, scrubs more floors, diapers more babies, accomplishes more 'do-it-yourself' wonders than any human male in history," with little-to-no thanks. To the writer, men worked far too hard, with little appreciation, and had lost not only their sense of self, but faced health consequences more often because of the tasks required of them. In her household, the author's husband would not be expected to help or risk losing anymore of his hard-earned masculinity by doing dishes and washing the floors.[19]

Articles that emphasized the decline of masculinity within the household as the wife's problem continued with a 1958 article in the *Lincoln Journal Star* entitled, "Ladies

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[18] "Egan Believes Women Rob Men of Masculinity," *Argus-Leader*, June 27, 1957; "Richard Egan Manages to Elude Women," *Rapid City Journal*, June 24, 1957.

[19] "I Feel Sorry for American Men," *Rapid City Journal*, August 26, 1956.

Admit Decline in Chivalry Their Fault." According to the article, women were the culprit for men losing their masculine qualities as they had forgotten how to achieve femininity themselves. This analysis assumed a binary oppositional relationship between masculinity and femininity, asserting "a feminine woman brings out the masculinity in men." By becoming more independent and moving into the workplace, and gaining "equal footing" among men, women lost their "womanly prerogative of being treated as a woman and reserving for themselves an 'island of femininity' that risked drowning any hopes of obtaining a masculine man."[20]

Newspapers in North Dakota throughout the 1950s also tackled the decline of masculinity and continued to link the decline with the problem of women. A nationally syndicated article from Ruth Millett asserted that wives must let their man "show off" to avoid bruising their masculinity, something that wives were not doing anymore. According to Millett, wives had a tendency "to cut their husbands down to husband-size" during social gatherings and, since she knows him so well, cuts him down "when he is asserting his masculinity." This, according to the article, not only punctures his self-esteem but highlights that a wife does not appreciate her husband.[21]

Millett continued her sentiments on masculinity into 1958. In an article entitled, "Career Requires Time, Too," included in the *Bismarck Tribune*, she asserted that

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[20] "Ladies Admit Decline in Chivalry Their Fault," *Lincoln Journal Star*, November 20, 1958.

[21] Ruth Millett, "The Woman's View," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, North Dakota), January 24, 1953.

"Where the husband is the only one in the family who goes out to work there is no excuse at all for a wife's expecting him to help her do half of her work after finishing his own." Further, a man needs to go out with his male friends to indulge in some "masculine companionship" so as to not find himself in a more and more "feminine-dominated" household. According to Millett, the man "who never gets away from his wife except to go to work loses a little of his masculinity as the years go by….yet many wives today….are downright selfish in not allowing their husbands to spend any time with other men." In this view, spending too much time in the household around his wife, would demasculinize a husband and reinforce his feminization.[22]

Argentinian actor Fernando Lamas echoed Millett's sentiments in the same year within the *Bismarck Tribune*. In an article entitled, "Fernando Lamas Thinks Men Need Time to Selves," Lamas asserted that to not be dominated by their wives, men needed to get out and spend time with other men. He asserted that in the U.S., "men have little opportunity for fellowship with each other. They go directly home to their wives. Because of this, they are in danger of losing their masculinity." Also, since American women tend to be aggressive and many men were unwilling to fight back, Lamas stated that "they wind up being assistant housewives, washing dishes, changing diapers and wearing aprons as a badge of their defeat." Further, Lamas asserted that men should not "enter the kitchen unless he really likes to cook as a hobby," and when he comes home from work, "he shouldn't be required to do housework." On how to alleviate the

[22] Ruth Millett, "Career Requires Time, Too," *Bismarck Tribune*, February 19, 1958.

enlistment of working around the house, Lamas urged men to fight back against their wives.[23]

As late as 1959, newspapers continued to include national articles on masculinity and men, though with a slightly different view. In August 1959, the *Rapid City Journal* included an article entitled, “What Every Man Knows – and Never Tells His Wife.” This article featured ten examples of issues and emotions that men kept bottled up so as not to risk losing their masculinity, though according to the article, “the self-discipline and quiet fortitude which mark true masculinity are often brushed aside, ignored, even laughed at.” Due to this, the author asserted that men often “childishly reveal and even flaunt emotions, ideas, thoughts and acts that every man knows – but no *real* man lets his wife discover.” Among the listed examples of what men commonly kept to themselves were hiding feelings of being taken for granted for his work; refraining from arguing about money issues; disregarding his sorrow when a wife reaches the age of not being able to bear children anymore; and “Perhaps above all else, the wise husband knows (and keeps to himself) the fact that no woman is above jealousy,” which is often “petty, unwarranted, even absurd.”[24]

However, the article concluded that though men should keep these emotions to themselves, men do have deep feelings. Interestingly, instead of trying to downplay these

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[23] “Fernando Lamas Thinks Men Need Time to Selves,” *Bismarck Tribune*, December 03, 1958.

[24] “What Every Man Knows – and Never Tells His Wife,” *Rapid City Journal*, August 16, 1959.

emotions, the author contended that he included examples of these hidden feelings for women to see that men do have emotions and that "the time has come to abandon the idiotic American notion that sensitiveness is sissy….Instead, it is the quality which most truly demonstrates real masculinity."[25] Rather than suppressing emotions to maintain their masculinity, acknowledging these emotions in the proper way was truly the definition of masculinity.

As articles in the Plains states throughout the 1950s varied on their opinions of masculinity and pulled heavily from the national rhetoric, the key argument often relied on tying femininity to masculinity. However, in the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, the significant loss of family farms in rural areas and rise in labor saving technology pushed more women into the workplace. Subsequently, men, taking on more roles in the household, began to shape a new ideal of masculinity.

In 1958, the *Lincoln Journal Star* featured an article that asserted that the modern husband is now a "jack-of-all-trades and helpmate," rather than a "stern domineering patriarch who scorned any kind of 'women work.'" Instead of domestic activities only being handled by the woman of the house, husbands did laundry, dishes, yardwork, fixed the car, and became a general handyman around the house. To illustrate this fact, the article included sentiments from men and women in Lincoln. According to the article, one housewife reported that her husband "is chief entertainer for the children during the evening hours, helps them with homework, and counsels them." A Lincoln husband

[25] "What Every Man Knows – and Never Tells His Wife."

asserted that he is “head cook every Saturday and Sunday with salads, chili and broiled meats.” Other jobs that husbands assumed included shopping, typist, babysitter, errand boy, and garbageman. According to the Lincoln women that were interviewed, the average workload of household duties performed by men “averaged 20 hours a week.” The article concluded with including hourly wages of what each of the jobs amount to, showcasing that men were putting in significant “work” within the household.[26]

A national article within the *Fremont Tribune* in 1957 entitled, “Most U.S. Husbands Aid Wives With Housework,” detailed that recent surveys had indicated that sixty-two percent of American husbands washed dishes and forty percent helped with cooking. The article explained that much of this help came because many wives worked outside of the household. Further, the article asserted that boys that see their fathers helping around the house were more likely to do so themselves, providing “good examples” for a partnership and for how husbands should treat their wives.[27] Conversely, another national article featured in the *Lincoln Journal Star* in 1958 “pit[ied] the future husbands of today’s teen-aged girls,” pointing out how “Dad’s pipe-and-slipper comfort will be only a memory.” The article explained that more teenage girls would prefer that their husbands helped with the housework, asserting that men should not “sit around leisurely while wives put in a 10 to 14 hour day.”[28]

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[26] “Best Buy for Home Odd Jobs is a Handy, Helpful Hubby,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, May 1, 1958.

[27] “Most U.S. Husbands Aid Wives With Housework,” *Fremont Tribune* (Fremont, Nebraska), November 25, 1957.

[28] “More Work For Husbands,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, June 29, 1958.

Contrasting the local sentiment that Nebraska men were now happy to help in the home, a local article in the March 1958 edition of the *Lincoln Journal Star* asserted that though "times have changed even in the ways husbands complain about their wives' housekeeping," the notions men have about their wives' domestic work "have a familiar ring to those the men of olden days must have had." Comparing men to the kings of the past, the article explained that most men of Lincoln complain that they always have a project to do or had to help with the housework. However, the article reminded men that they should "count themselves fortunate that they have only to plug in a cord and guide a little tube or smooth rolling machine as their contribution to the shining, sparkling house in which they like to live."[29]

Married men and women were not the only ones chiming in on whether men should be helping around the house, however. In South Dakota, high school students took part in a poll that asked, "should husbands help with the household duties?" According to the Platte High School students, 75 percent responded that "husbands should help with household duties." Sixty to seventy percent of the students also noted that their fathers already helped with the housework, with only thirty-three percent not helping. Students also offered their opinions on why husbands should help around the house. One student, freshman Loren Van Wyk, asserted that husbands should help around the house because "'It helps to form closer relationships in the home and it is a

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[29] "Times Change More Than Do Hubbies' Complaints," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 22, 1958.

good example for children.'" Another student, Jerry Hegg, asserted that "husbands should help with household duties because it shows that they love their wife and it also sets a good example."[30]

The national view, however, provided contrasting sentiments. Located directly below the Platte High School student poll answers, the *Daily Republic* included an article on a national poll discussing the same issue. Instead of showcasing that high schoolers, both male and female, thought that their fathers should help around the house, the article revealed a gendered split. Girls "for the most part were all for putting an apron on father an allowing him to work off office tension on the business end of a broom or dishmop." Boys, however, "thought that such domestic duties were degrading to the man of the house, not at all in keeping with his dignity, rank and need for relaxation." According to the article, eighty-three percent of girls called on dad "to climb out of that rocking chair and get to work," and fifty-five percent of boys urged him to "stay right where he is and enjoy a well earned rest." On helping with the nightly dishes, 15-year-old Virginia Lee Brown from Indiana stated, "'Why shouldn't he do the dishes, he ate, didn't he?'" Conversely, 18-year-old John Curry from Iowa asserted, "'Doing dishes is part of a wife's duties and she shouldn't need help.'" The poll answers switched regarding husbands doing office work at home, with fifty percent of girls saying that men should not do office work at home, while boys, largely opposed to their fathers doing housework, overwhelmingly agreed that doing office work at home was acceptable. The

[30] "Platte Youths Think Father Should Help Mom With Dishes," *The Daily Republic* (Mitchell, South Dakota), May 07, 1959.

article concluded that, "either way, it looks like dad is destined for some homework: the boys favor his doing office work at the house, and the girls are all for him getting into the domestic swing of things with a broom or a mop."[31]

The inclusion of two contrasting viewpoints within the same newspaper are telling. Locally, sons and daughters in South Dakota believed that their fathers should be helping in the household and saw no threat to their masculinity by doing so. The national view, however, remained set on showcasing that the acceptable form of male housework was that of continuing their office work and not contributing to domestic household duties. The two opposing articles are also telling in another way. While South Dakota youth were not divided among "boy" and "girl" answers, the national poll strictly divided the two genders and asserted that girls were following their mothers' efforts of trying to get their husbands to do housework, whereas boys reinforced a masculinity that relegated housework to their mothers.

Articles throughout the *Bismarck Tribune* in the late 1950s also hold considerable mixed messages concerning husbands and housework. Seemingly poking fun at husbands who thought it unnecessary to help around the house, an August 1958 local article, entitled, "Helping Hands," stated "Harried husbands harassed into helping houseclean this fall cast covetous looks at the shift of firemen on duty at the fire hall." Utilizing masculine firemen as an example, the short article went on to say that the fire crew cleaned their quarters from top to bottom with such speed and efficiency that it

[31] "National Poll Shows Teens Are Divided Over Dish Issue," *Daily Republic*, May 07, 1959.

"would take care of the average residence in virtually no time, if they could get the housewife out of their way."[32] In this example, cleaning is highlighted as a masculine chore and as a duty that a true masculine man should take pride in accomplishing.

Likewise, earlier in the same year, Ruth Millett answered a question from a reader on what exactly a partnership means between a husband and a wife. The reader's question asked, "'Judging from some of the letters you print from husbands, there are still a lot of married men in the world who have never given the partnership idea of marriage a try.'" Millett went on to explain how a partnership within the home works, asserting that a good husband partner "remembers that when she's snowed under with housework, [he] gets out the vacuum cleaner without being asked." Further, Millett explained that, any man who "has never tried partnership in marriage ought to give it a go. Man, it's lots more fun than the Battle of the Sexes some of you are still fighting."[33]

However, much like all newspapers during the time, the *Bismarck Tribune* included national comic strips. Located in the February 1959 edition of the paper, the comic strip "Freckles" featured a mother asking her husband "Henry" to help with the dishes. In the comic strip, the father quickly passes the responsibility off to the son "Freckles" who then promptly calls to his little brother to help his mother. The last frame of the cartoon features the mother answering the door with a happy little girl standing in the threshold stating, "What's the difference who I am? I love to wash dishes."[34] The

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[32] "Helping Hands," *Bismarck Tribune*, August 21, 1958.

[33] Ruth Millett, "Husbands: Try to Be Partners," *Bismarck Tribune*, February 07, 1958.

[34] "Freckles," *Bismarck Tribune*, February 09, 1959.

comic strip, though humorous, sums up the national sentiment of the 1950s. Mother, wishing for aid in the kitchen, finds little help from her husband and sons, but is saved by a little girl who is happy to match her perceived role in society, despite having no attachment to the family. Since comic strips were often widely read by the whole family during the 1950s, this cartoon is especially telling. While presumably poking fun at national views, comic strips often matched the rhetoric of the time.

Nevertheless, according to historian Michael Kimmel in his assessment of manhood in America, the national ideal asserted that as long as men remained "reliable breadwinners and devoted dads, they could become wild and adventurous consumers, savoring real men's 'true' adventures or grabbing fantasy thrills with traditional heroes like cowboys" or with mainly Hollywood actors.[35] Helping around the house could allow men to remain masculine, as long as they stayed true to their roles as breadwinners, and their adventurous mainly roots. Due to the mass popular culture of the time, this image often played out through admiring masculine heroes in books and on T.V. and movies.

Another alternative image of masculinity featured men being able to recoup their masculinity through individuality. Articles in *Playboy* magazine within the 1950s explained that single men creating a bachelor pad allowed for building a convincing fantasy of not only sexual and economic power, but individual consumption as well. According to the 1956 article, "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment," the bachelor pad "is, or should be, the outward reflection of his inner self – a comfortable, livable, and yet

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[35] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 165.

exciting expression of the person he is and the life he leads."[36] Writing in *Playboy* in 1958, Philip Wylie argued that women were to blame for man's loss of masculinity as they had taken over traditionally male spaces and wanted "to invade everything masculine, emasculate it, cover it with dimity, occupy it forever." Further, they had similarly feminized the home with a "boudoir-kitchen-nursery, dreamed up by women for women, and as if males did not exist as males."[37]

Rather than staying single in pursuit of a bachelor's pad, however, articles asserted that married men could build these spaces to visualize themselves as single men to recover a sense of individuality. According to Arthur Schlesingler Jr. in his article, "The Crisis of American Masculinity," men needed to "recover a sense of individual spontaneity," and to do this he "must visualize himself as an individual from the group….which defines his values and commands his loyalty."[38] Creating a male space within the home provided men with an idea of fulfilling masculine domesticity and a way to build this masculine identity by focusing on consumption of goods instead of through family and work.

Ideas of men's individual space were often addressed in two ways within newspapers: through humorous comic strips and through tips on furnishing a masculine space. Again containing national comic strips within Plains newspapers, both the *Argus-*

[36] "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment," *Playboy*, October 1956, 65.

[37] Philip Wylie, "The Womanization of America," *Playboy*, October 1958, 77.

[38] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The Crisis of American Masculinity," *Esquire*, November 1958, 65.

Leader and the *Bismarck Tribune* included satirical cartoons that addressed men's loss of space within the home. In 1958, "The Neighbors" comic strip, located within the *Argus-Leader*, featured a picture of two women talking in the threshold of the kitchen with one stating, "This is our new kitchen. It used to be my husband's den." In the background, the husband is shown dressed up in a frilly apron, washing the dishes.[39] Similarly, the *Bismarck Tribune* featured the comic strip "Tizzy." Within this cartoon, two teenage girls are shown standing in a room with male décor, taken over by women's clothes, feminine lamps, an iron and ironing board, children's toys strewn about, and a fitting caption at the bottom stating, "…and this is my father's den!."[40] Nationally, these two comic strips not only spoke to the belief that women had taken over the home, but that men had lost all hopes of a personal and individual space.

At the same time, local articles instructed men and women on how to create a male space within the home. In 1957, the *Fremont Tribune* included an article entitled, "Husband Needs Nook to Hide In." The article asserted, "Every man needs a private lair within his castle where he can sneak away with his books, his guns, stamps, or whatever is closest to his heart." To plan such a "bear's lair," the article explained that to provide for a "masculine atmosphere" wood wall paneling, deep, restful tones, bookcases, cabinets, and a nook for a television set so he can watch "wrestling matches after dinner"

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[39] "The Neighbors," *Argus-Leader*, May 24, 1958.

[40] "Tizzy," *Bismarck Tribune*, June 30, 1959; *Beatrice Daily Sun*, June 30, 1959; *Fremont Tribune*, June 30, 1959.

were a must to provide him with this own "special throne room."[41] Likewise, in 1959, the *Rapid City Journal* included an article entitled, "Hints on Equipping New Den For Man." Within this article, ideas for creating a male space are detailed to build a "sanctum away from household clatter" where men can "read, write, or just 'think things out.'" The answer to making the space masculine began with introducing leather to the space. According to the article, "Leather by nature and tradition is the most masculine of materials. A man feels most like a man in leather." The "musts" of including leather within the space started with a leather armchair and continued with a leather-topped desk, "a major factor in setting a masculine atmosphere" that combined "practicality and good looks." Further, to really tie the place together, a leather-based lamp to sit atop of the leather desk was also necessary.[42]

While the loss of male masculinity was often mocked and chastised in national magazines, newspaper articles, and comic strips, magazines targeted at men and local newspaper articles often instructed men on how to create a personal and masculine space within the home. These spaces, though within the family household, allowed men to reimagine a new masculinity through an expression of their own individual personality. Whether it was relaxing after a hard day of work, after aiding with the housework and children, or the need to simply escape from the modern world, men created a space within their home to channel their inner Hemingway and redefine what it meant to be masculine in a tumultuous decade of changing gender roles.

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[41] "Husband Needs Nook to Hide In," *Fremont Tribune*, September 14, 1957.

[42] "Hints on Equipping New Den For Man," *Rapid City Journal*, March 19, 1959.

Despite assertions of a masculinity crisis, men during the 1950s navigated ideas of manliness and created their own space both outside and inside the home. While national articles held on to ideas of specific masculine and feminine spheres and that society was destroying men's masculine identity, local articles showcased men's ability to redefine what it meant to be a husband and father. Though many wished to hold on to some traditional values, men in the Dakotas and Nebraska claimed that they were willing to help with household duties, sentiments often matched by the boys who would become future husbands of America. Though the nation seemed eager to blame women on a feminization of America and the loss of masculinity, men in the Plains states seemed less apt to subordinate women to reinstate their manliness. Mirroring James Gilbert's analysis of the 1950s, though men on the Plains still saw masculinity as central to their identity, they did not see marriage or helping with the household chores as considerable threats. Instead, they reimagined and renegotiated their perceived spaces within society and the home to conceptualize a new individualized masculine identity.

CONCLUSION

The 1950s in America denotes a time of conservative social and political conformity. National rhetoric emphasized traditional roles of domesticity for women and positioned men as the head of the household. National advertisements featured women happily dressed in aprons standing at the stove as their husbands, dressed in gray flannel suits, sat comfortably in the background smoking their pipes. The message seemed simple: to benefit from a prosperous post-WWII world and to keep above the communist threat, American society needed to adhere to traditional and fixed masculine and feminine roles. Yet, throughout national mass media, messages often remained varied. As highlighted within this thesis, these mixed messages were especially prevalent within national and local newspaper articles and advertisements throughout Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Though historical analyses of men and women during the 1950s have reexamined traditional studies on gender to highlight that both men and women were able to navigate beyond these traditional expectations, emphasis has often been placed on the overarching national goal of reinforcing fixed gender and societal roles, offering little study on regional areas. A gendered and regional analysis, such as this thesis, offers an interesting lens through which we can examine specific gender roles and expectations and offers insight into how men and women in the northern Great Plains were able to navigate between these diverse expectations.

This thesis outlines the myriad of ways that men and women in Nebraska and the Dakotas were able to navigate the mixed messages of national and local mass media.

First, chapter one addresses the many ways that articles and popular media pushed women into marriage and domestic duties. It also showcased that many women within the Midwest area, aided by a significant decline in family farms, were not simply content with staying within the home as they moved to the workplace in increasing numbers. These married working women often faced conflicting messages on gender-specific attitudes and grappled with double standards of maintaining beauty and a feminine image. Further, many of these married women also moved into the political arena and were credited with the decline of political corruption and advocated for women's rights, equal pay in the workplace, and fought for more educational opportunities for women.

Likewise, chapter two analyzes how single women in Nebraska and the Dakotas navigated beyond the national ideals of marriage and a family. Despite a majority of national and local articles calling to single women to settle down and find the perfect mate, many pushed beyond the preset borders to find fulfillment in their lives. Many chose to remain single to continue their education, allowing them to be employed in professional careers. Though barraged with strict sex norms within magazines and newspapers, many single women explored their sexuality and engaged in sexual acts that both shocked the nation and reinforced that single women were not afraid to navigate outside of societal expectations. Featuring local articles that featured many opinions and writings on abortions and children's homes, this thesis also highlights that many single women were taking control of their bodies in their choices to have sex, raise children out of wedlock, and have abortions at increasing rates.

Adding another layer to understanding gender roles and expectations during the 1950s, chapter three offers analysis on men and ideas of masculinity on the Plains during a decade that was labeled as having a "masculinity crisis." Throughout the 1950s, many books and articles pointed to a loss of masculinity in men, blaming "Momism" and the overaggressiveness of women. However, despite the perceived loss of masculinity brought on by men helping more around the house and working in an ever-expanding capitalist society, many men were able to reimagine and renegotiated masculine spaces and create new ideas of what it meant to be a man. Though they often faced conflicting messages, and traditional accounts of men in the 1950s often show them as the main breadwinners who left the domestic duties to the women, local sentiments highlight that many men helped around the house and did not feel threatened by the women in their lives.

These three chapters come together to illuminate a different look on a common theme in American history: though the 1950s is often seen as a decade of fixed gender roles and strict national expectations, a regional analysis of the states of Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota showcase that gender roles were in constant flux. This instability is reiterated within the mixed messages of both national magazines and national and local newspaper articles. Though popular images of women in the kitchen and men in their business suits dominated popular culture, both men and women, whether married or single, navigated outside these spheres, challenging traditional perceptions and laying the foundation for considerable changes in the 1960s and beyond.

In the 1960s and 1970s, advertisements directed at women came under intense criticism and scrutiny due to their stereotyping and insulting nature. During this time, ad agencies began to re-evaluate their portrayal of women's roles in society. Now, ads featured women in atypical ways and involved in activities and scenarios that had previously only been exclusive to men.[1] Perfume campaigns featured young, confident women in pantsuits and pursuing traditionally male-oriented activities; AT&T showcased a woman telephone installer on top of a phone pole, calling to more women to be installers; and Tampax displayed two women controlling hi-tech equipment in a broadcasting studio.[2]

Today, while advertisements have largely shifted to adapt to women entering the workforce in increasingly higher numbers, cultural norms in America continued to promote the importance of beauty and physical attractiveness while simultaneously promoting a woman's role in society. Though women have largely made gains throughout the 21st century in equality, educational gains, and employment opportunities, the insistence on maintaining a particular image and being a good mother and housewife continue to permeate advertisements. Advertisements emphasize a thin body type, and most portray young, thin, and white women.[3] Those who have bigger bodies are usually

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[1] Daniel D. Hill, *Advertising to the American Woman, 1900-1999* (Ohio State University Press, 2002), 189.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Alex Kuczynski, "The Incredible Shrinking Plus-Size Model, *New York Times* (New York City, NY), March 29, 1998.

portrayed as having bad bodies that limit them in numerous ways, regardless of the few who are immortalized as plus-size models.

Researchers and critics specifically point to women's fashion and beauty magazines as the most significant in promoting these standards as they specifically include advertisements that portray the types of women that represent the unattainable beauty ideal. According to the CDC, the mean weight and BMI in adults have increased since 2000. Though the average height has largely remained the same since 2004 at 5 ft 3 inches, the average weight for women has increased from 164 pounds to 170.5 pounds.[4] This stands in direct contrast to images that portray the average model size of 5 feet 11 inches tall with the weight of 115 pounds.[5]

In the 21st century, though many ads that starred helpless and stereotypical housewives and women pining to get skinny through smoking cigarettes throughout the 20th century have largely been removed from advertisements, the infatuation with beauty, perfect skin, and the perfect shape largely remains. The 2020 January issue of *Vogue* specifically highlights this continuation. This issue, while featuring renowned plus-size model Ashley Graham and including an article on her, largely includes thin women and ads on makeup and face creams that offer "full coverage" and can allow you to have

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[4] Cheryl Fryar, Deanna Kruszon-Moran, Qiuping Gu, and Cynthia Ogden, "Mean Body Weight, Height, Waist Circumferences, and Body Mass Index Among Adults: United States, 1999-2000 Through 2015-2016," National Health Statistics Reports, no. 122, 2018.

[5] J. Tung, "Bigger Bodies are Back," *Good Housekeeping*, 2002, 133.

"your best skin at any age."[6] Likewise, the advertisements within *Cosmopolitan*, arguably the most read woman's magazine, present a continuation of the unobtainable image. *Cosmopolitan* ads feature beautiful, flawless, and sexualized celebrities marketing products that call for women to buy perfumes to gain love, lotion and body washes that will keep your skin youthful and soft, and makeup that will reverse aging. One Loreal ad claims to be able to reverse "weak, dry, dull, [and] rough hair" while simultaneously featuring Jennifer Lopez with beautiful shining hair and unblemished skin.[7]

These magazine advertisements, coupled with television ads and the rapid growth of social media, focus directly on a beauty ideal that send a message to its readers and viewers that one's looks are the only characteristic that is important to the individual and to society. In fact, some critics argue that advertisements reinforce a cultural history of determining worth, chiefly a woman's worth, by physical appearance.[8] This has profound negatives effects. When people believe that they are valued for only one part of themselves, their other attributes and accomplishments become trivialized and insignificant. Further, this leads to women developing body image and self-esteem issues. Countless studies have been done that connect exposure to thin and beautiful models with negative self-esteem among women. Since thin and beautiful models appear

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[6] Lancome Paris, Advertisement, *Vogue*, 2020; Covergirl, Advertisement, *Vogue*, 2020.

[7] Loreal, Advertisement, *Cosmopolitan*, 2017.

[8] Kim Bartel Sheehan, *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising* (California: Sage Publications, 2014), 106.

in magazine advertisements, women largely feel helpless and less-than because these models present an unobtainable image.

Today, many companies create advertisements that are critical of the beauty industry and have launched ad campaigns that focus on low self-esteem for young women; showcasing that women are underrepresented in tech companies; and portraying women in images that are un-photoshopped and embracing their bodies. However, "empowering" ads such as Always's #LikeAGirl campaign and Loreal's leadership campaign are not actually about creating empowered women but more focused on creating empowered consumers out of women and keeping them part of the patriarchal and capitalistic culture. Body positivity ads too, instead of creating the thought that the look of the body is not that important, put the focus back on the female body. Feminist scholars argue that while body positivity is important, the kinds of bodies that are portrayed are still typically thin, white, and very conventionally beautiful. In response, fat-shaming and slut-shaming become prevalent.

Aside from creating advertisements and articles focused on women's beauty and appearance, many current articles still instruct men and women on the importance of finding a suitable partner and give advice on how to know if someone has feelings for you. A recent article featured in *Cosmopolitan*, entitled, "21 Signs The Man You Like Really Likes You Back," asserted that, "Unless you're a mind reader it's nearly impossible to fully know how someone feels about you…..this is *especially* true when it comes to understanding men's thoughts and feelings. Men tend to suppress their

emotions because of societal standards, which can make dating even harder to navigate."[9] Directed at helping a reader dissect men's emotions and feelings toward a woman, this recent national article seems to mirror much of the sentiment of seventy years ago and reinforces the idea that women need advice on how to understand men's emotions, emotions and feelings that are often "suppressed."

In a world of social media and online dating conveniently at one's fingertips, national articles contained in local Midwest newspapers often offer advice to readers on how to properly find a date online. Featured within Nebraska's *Fremont Tribune* and South Dakota's *Rapid City Journal*, a recent article entitled, "Dating Cheat Sheet: 25 Tips to Deploy While Pursuing Romance," offered twenty-five non-gendered tips on how to properly find and treat a date. These tips varied from "Be kind to people," "Stop ghosting people," "Ask questions," "Smile," and urged, "Don't talk about your ex."[10] This article, though devoid of gender specific terms, highlights that dating advice and tips can still widely be found, signifying a continued emphasis on marriage and family units.

Yet, many recent articles found within local newspapers in the Dakotas and Nebraska also highlight a continued thought on traditional gender roles, especially when it comes to dating and marriage. A poll conducted in 2014 on dating asserted that when people lay out their thoughts on dating, many contradictions arise, "especially when it comes to money and gender roles." According to the poll, the traits that women and men

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[9] "21 Signs The Man You Like Really Like You Back," *Cosmopolitan*, August 13, 2020.

[10] "Dating Cheat Sheet: 25 Tips to Deploy While Pursuing Romance," *Fremont Tribune* (Fremont, Nebraska), August 15, 2020; *Rapid City Journal* (Rapid City, South Dakota), August 10, 2020.

rated as important "hew to traditional gender roles." The article explained that though Americans' views on women and their careers and emphasis on balancing a family have shifted, the poll found "a more restrictive view on how men with a family ought to view their career." Still, the poll suggested that traditional views of gender still come into play, especially regarding women's looks and the financial stability of men.[11]

Perhaps the most intriguing recent studies on gender roles in today's world compared to the 1950s, however, can be found in a 2011 article in the *Bismarck Tribune*. Written by two female high school students, the article, entitled, "Breaking Down the Gender Role Barrier," asserted that "Men are the breadwinners. Women belong in the kitchen. Men go to work. Women watch the children. Men are the heads of households. Women are the housekeepers. These are age-old stereotypes that belong in the 1950s, yet they still exist in society today." The answer to this continuation, according to the article, is that gender roles are so well-integrated into American society and are often accepted and considered the societal norm because they have been passed from generation to generation and are reinforced within the media and entertainment industry. They want to belong and people's attraction to others also deeply influence what is considered acceptable by society. The article continued, "While many people think stereotypes are a thing of the past, they still exist, even if subconsciously. People adhere to gender roles less strictly than in previous years, but they still do it in a multitude of ways." Further, though society has come a long way from men "bringing home the bacon" and women

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[11] "Money-Dating Poll Finds Multiple Conflicts," *Rapid City Journal*, June 01, 2014.

frying it up, stereotypes are most often broken down through "exposure to new experiences and education."[12] The message is simple: society has continued to give specific roles to both genders, and only society can break down those gender barriers.

While there have been increasing studies on binary gender roles in the U.S. since the 1990s, there is still a great deal of research to do when it comes to the more rural and conservative states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. A regional analysis, including a demographic breakdown is necessary in understanding the continuation of societal gender expectations. Studies on Native American men and women in the area, along with other minorities populations, could have incredible potential in understanding how societal roles and Euro-American gender expectations have affected men and women across all race and class lines. Further, the Great Plains states are often said to be "border" states between the ideas of the East and the West. Much of the analysis of national magazines and newspapers within this thesis situate on ideas coming from the Eastern states, denoting a national identity that begins in the east and moves west. However, more analysis is needed on the western bordering states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska to test the border states theory and to compare Great Plains gender expectations with those in states further west.

The applicability of a gendered and regional analysis of mass media within the Midwest during the 1950s and beyond is endless. These states, along with an analysis of newspapers in the area, offer important insight into gendered inequalities and

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[12] Tonya Bauer and Carrie Sandstrom, "Breaking Down the Gender Role Barriers," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, North Dakota), March 28, 2011.

marginalization within society that continues to hold outdated expectations for men and women based on a continued desire to hold onto American traditions and symbolize a considerable fear of change. While many often look back at the advertisements and representations of the 1950s in humor, recent analyses showcase that Americans are far less removed from this decade than they claim. Although many gains have been made in women's rights, gender rights, and many changes have occurred within the household, societal representations, along with society itself, still places great emphasis on adhering to traditional notions of gender and reinforces age-old stereotypes. An analysis of media in the Great Plains states of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, however, show that mixed messages about gender occurred in the 1950s, suggesting that, contrary to popular images, challenges to traditional gender roles is one of historical continuity with the recent past

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